

ReModel

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**Create mental models
to improve your life and lead
simply and effectively**

Joshua Spodek, PhD MBA

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Preface

The business guru Peter Drucker's parable of the three stonecutters illustrates how different people find different value and meaning from their work (and lives).

Three stonecutters were asked what they were doing.

The first looked unhappy. He said, "I'm making a living cutting stones."

The second looked happier and proud. He kept on hammering while he said, "I'm doing the best job cutting stones in the entire country."

The third looked up with a visionary gleam in his eye and said, "I'm building a cathedral."

Cathedral Builders do the same activities in the same environments as everyone else, but they love their work and are happier. He may be fictional, but you know people like him. Their "cathedrals" may be their company, sports team, family, or whatever their passion. Cathedral Builders aren't "fat, dumb, and happy." They become healthier, fatigue less, get promoted faster, and get offered other jobs more.

Most people sense meaning in this parable but don't see how to use it to improve their lives or careers. They use it to *evaluate* their situation instead of *improve* it. You might have asked yourself these questions:

- Which of the three would I rather be?
- Which one am I now?
- Which one would I hire first or want in my community?
- Which one are more of my friends and peers like?

Those questions aren't bad, but they evaluate without giving direction. We already know we would rather be Cathedral Builders; we'd rather hire them and have them in our teams and communities; and we want people like them in our lives.

Those questions don't help us improve our lives. These do.

How do you *become* a Cathedral Builder?

and

How do you *lead and inspire others* to become Cathedral Builders?

This book shows you how to become a Cathedral Builder. Then

you can lead and inspire others to become Cathedral Builders too.

The people you inspire will thank you for leading them, feel loyal to you, and want you to lead them again.

What makes someone a Cathedral Builder?

What sets the Cathedral Builder apart?

First, Cathedral Builders have different *beliefs*. This book will talk a lot about beliefs, which it also calls “mental models,” or “models” for short.

Second, Cathedral Builders have the *skills to change their beliefs*. Since people aren't born doing their passions, Cathedral Builders learn to create beliefs to match their passions. This book also covers how to create beliefs so *you* can become a Cathedral Builder.

Changing your models is how you remodel your life.

Business books, even on leadership, shy away from covering beliefs and models, probably because you can't measure or observe them through your senses, despite influencing everything you perceive and do. Lack of awareness of others' beliefs will undermine relationships and create misunderstanding. Having awareness and belief-related skills can motivate, inspire, and create meaning, value, importance, and purpose.

I want to point out that this book won't say anything about your beliefs manifesting themselves, a secret law of attraction, the power of positive thinking, or anything mystical, though if that perspective works for you so will this book. I have a PhD in Physics, respect the natural world, and dislike new-age thinking and ideas that can't be disproved. When I talk about effects of beliefs, I don't mean they mysteriously affect the world. Still, as Albert Einstein noted,

Whether you can observe a thing or not depends on the theory which you use. It is the theory which decides what can be observed,

so beliefs do directly affect *you* and your behavior, and your behavior affects your environment, which I consider reasonable talk. I intend all this book's talk about beliefs and mental models to stand to reason and testing. (Please contact me with any mistakes and I'll correct future editions.)

The Cathedral Builder's beliefs give him an advantage. They change how he sees his world, leading to the happiness, emotional reward, effective behaviors and communication, meaningful relationships, and so on that you've seen in the Cathedral Builders you know. If *you* can choose *your* beliefs, you can make your life as good to you as his is to him. If you can lead others to change their beliefs, you can lead them to find meaning in their work and lives, leading to greater productivity, satisfaction, loyalty, and more. They'll thank you for helping them after working hard for you.

We may all live in and interact with the same physical world, but our

thoughts, emotions, motivations, and decisions come from our beliefs and mental models of that world. Our beliefs determine how we feel about our worlds.

So if we only need to change our beliefs to improve our jobs, careers, and lives, why don't we?

We don't because believing something means believing something is *right*, meaning believing something else is *wrong*. People who aren't Cathedral Builders believe the Cathedral Builder is *wrong*. They say things like

Look, I'm a realist. Let's be practical. I *really am* just cutting stone. That building-a-cathedral guy isn't *really* building a cathedral. He's wrong. He's just playing a bit role and fooling himself into an unearned fake happiness. That's what's *really* happening. If you stop kidding yourself you'll realize how miserable your situation is too.

You know people like that. You may *be* someone like that. People who talk like that are right in their own minds—that is, they're self-righteous. They're also miserable. More importantly, they're inflexible. Merely tolerating others' beliefs won't change us. Changing our own will. Few realize it, but people can switch beliefs, end up just as right, and enjoy life more.

People clinging to their rightness (and misery) object to challenges to their beliefs. Let's look at some common objections.

Some object "The making-a-living guy hates his job. If he started liking it, he'd lose his motivation to switch and get stuck instead of leaving. Since I don't like my job, I should stay miserable so I'll leave."

The objection sounds plausible but I suggest otherwise. In my experience, dissatisfaction doesn't help get new jobs.

First, if he wants others to hire him, ask yourself which guy would be recommended for promotion or other jobs first?

Second, consider what I see as a coach. Many clients hire me to help them change jobs. If in the process they can't yet leave their old jobs, I help them make them more palatable. As they learn the lessons you will from this book, they learn to tolerate, then accept, and then celebrate their old jobs. They learn the solutions to their problems are often internal, not external. Fixing those internal problems allows them to find meaning from their jobs, teammates, managers, and so on.

Some clients end up enjoying their old jobs enough to stay, saving time, money, and other resources. Those who change jobs seem more calm and thorough in their searches. Their friends seem more open to help them and they seem more confident about interviews.

In other words, again, job dissatisfaction rarely helps get new jobs better than the skills in this book.

Others object “Maybe the Cathedral Builder loved chopping rocks in the first place and got lucky finding a job he would love before he started. If I found a job I loved, I'd be as happy as him too.” Maybe, but more likely he had to face as many problems as anyone else. Do you think you uniquely have problems with your job, team, spouse, parents, or whatever? Hardly. We all face problems, including the Cathedral Builder.

For that matter, he found his greatest value not in his low-level activity of cutting stone. Nobody finds their greatest value in low-level work. Like everyone who finds great meaning in life, he connected his low-level activity to something greater. You can too. If customers pay for your company's products or services, they find value in them. That means they find value in your contribution.

Misery never helps. Even if you don't like your job, you can more effectively do something about it when you aren't miserable from it.

You always benefit from having the Cathedral Builder skill to choose your beliefs. Yet few resources help you develop it. This book does.

This book helps you change your beliefs

This book doesn't try to change your beliefs. Only you can change them. This book helps you learn and develop skills to do so. Like learning to dance or play the piano, a book helps, but ultimately you learn through *experience*. Like starting with scales before working up to music, this book starts simple, with awareness, and builds from there.

This book presents examples of beliefs someone (me) consciously created and adopted and a few exercises to start you creating and adopting your own. I describe the beliefs—about one per chapter—how they work, when I use them, what old ones they replace, and where they lead. The exercises are simple and take little time or resources but increase your awareness and flexibility in adopting beliefs.

Who am I, why did I write this book, and why should you care?

I've coached people on improving their lives and careers for years— one-on-one and within large organizations (my bio on page 14 describes more of my background). I've seen in my clients tremendous success come from learning the skills to create and change beliefs—that is, the skills to become a Cathedral Builder.

I've seen the value of these skills in established leaders, people on the cusp of leadership learning to lead others, people starting their careers learning to lead themselves, and everywhere in between. Most importantly, I've seen people's lives and careers transformed. I transformed my life similarly. I can help them do it in months instead of the years it took me. Why reinvent the wheel?

Despite the tremendous value and effectiveness of these skills, few resources exist to help develop them. Business literature rarely covers

beliefs and mental models, nor does science literature. Personal development literature tends to treat them new-agey or like religion.

Because we need experience to learn social skills, I created exercises for them. The exercise this book is based on, detailed in chapter 2, emerged from client work. The exercise is to notice and list your beliefs for a week. It costs nothing and takes a few minutes per day.

I did the exercise in-depth and the results became this book. Before doing it I expected to find maybe ten models that defined my world. I found closer to a hundred and learned to find new ones even faster. Many I had consciously created and adopted in the past few years. I expect you'll experience something similar.

The order of the exercises in the book roughly matches the order in which they arose in my life that week. I reordered some when one depended on another to avoid confusion. Though I found reordering logically helped the book pedagogically, I held back from reordering them more to illustrate how unpredictably beliefs arise in life, owing to life's unpredictability.

I found a week gives enough time to hit most of your main beliefs and to pick up the skills of identifying beliefs, recognizing they aren't reality, and realizing how much they form your reality.

Are these skills all you need to transform your life? No, but they are a major component hardly covered elsewhere. Many great books contain one new mental model and present it from many sides, like that mastery takes 10,000 hours or that men are from Mars and women are from Venus—a great strategy for getting you to adopt that belief. This book instead covers about seventy beliefs. The goal is to cover models in general, not specific models. **I'd rather you learned to create your own beliefs and forgot mine than didn't learn the skill and adopted all my models.** I don't pretend my beliefs have universal value, but I do find universal value in the skill to create your own beliefs.

I was as self-righteously inflexible as anyone, yet learned to become a Cathedral Builder, gaining all the associated benefits. I have no special abilities to change. Anyone can transform like I did.

I wouldn't have expected that I could create and choose beliefs consciously and voluntarily. I thought beliefs besides mine were wrong. But small changes in my beliefs led to bigger ones and I developed my skills. Practice makes it easier to adopt more challenging beliefs, like how to win an NBA championship as a 66-year-old grandmother or to turn jerks into people who improve your life.

You can create and adopt new beliefs too. People do it all the time. For example, a few years ago, mainstream society believed pasta healthy and bacon deadly. Now it believes the opposite. If so many people changed, you can too.

This book's purpose

This book's goal is not to cover *all* my beliefs or even my most important ones, though I did cover some I find valuable, especially ones relevant to leadership and personal development. Nor did I intend to cover the most earth-shattering ones.

My goal was to show something like what you will come up with when you do the exercise in in chapter 2 yourself. The more accessible they are the more they help you create your own. I want to give you the skills to become a Cathedral Builder.

My beliefs work for me. If you want a life like mine—calm, friendly, curious, fit, resilient, etc; with little stress, angst, regret, blame, and guilt—try some of my beliefs yourself. If you want a different lifestyle than mine, some may still work for you, but read the book more to learn skills and create your own beliefs.

As valuable and helpful as my beliefs are to me, they are a minor part of this book. The major point is what they illustrate—*that you can create and choose your beliefs*. Again, I'd rather have you reject every belief in this book but learn to create better ones for you than to adopt each of mine but not learn that skill.

Whoever you are or want to become, Cathedral Builder skills improve your life. Maybe you want to become a competitive athlete. Then you might prefer beliefs about dedication, perseverance, physical mastery, etc. If you're a new mom you might want beliefs related to children, patience, and living without sleep.

I expect you'll consider some of my beliefs stupid or unbelievable. Fine. Mine aren't for everyone. I don't list them prescriptively, but to show you their diversity and illustrate that you can create and choose your own, as different from mine as you want.

You may consider my beliefs false or wrong. Chapter 1 attempts to liberate you from this judgmental trap—the main trap of the first stone-cutter. You'll see, if you didn't already, the point of a belief is to help you achieve your goals, not to be absolutely right. These beliefs work for me. You'll find ones that work for you.

This book is designed to help you improve your life by

- Showing you you can change, create, and choose beliefs and mental models.
- Presenting examples of beliefs you can adopt if you want. Some date back thousands of years, others I made up. One came from Warren Buffet's friends, another from a great dancer (chapter Error: Reference source not found), and so on.
- Contrasting new beliefs with the old ones they replaced to show you what changes you can make.

Some key concepts and terminology

What does it mean to *improve* your life?

I don't believe money, power, fame, and other external or material things alone improve your life, not that I dislike them. Even your achievements, relationships, and family don't say whether you'll like your life or not. What makes one person like their life may make another dislike theirs. People have different values.

What matters to you is what brings you **meaning**, what you **value**, what you consider **important**, and where you find **purpose**. We filter everything external through these personal concepts. Though meaning, value, importance, and purpose each have slightly different meanings, in writing this book I found anytime I used one of these four words, I wanted to write the other three as well. Instead of writing all four each time I coined and started using the term **MVIP** to represent the combination of them all—not to diminish the nuances but to include all their meanings each time.

I found myself interchanging two other sets of words with slightly different meanings too. I've written about **beliefs** so far, but in the rest of the book I use the terms **model**, **mental model**, and **perspective** synonymously. Likewise, I've talked about **emotions** so far, but in the rest of the book I use the terms **motivation** and **mood** synonymously too. Rather than repeat all the terms all the time, I used them interchangeably. I hope this doesn't cause confusion.

Finally, I include many hyperlinks. Two of the most important chapters' content (on The Model, and on The Method), is contained in the links from those chapters. I linked only to content available at no charge and with no need to sign up. Most links are to my web page, joshuaspoddek.com. Most others are to Wikipedia, YouTube, Amazon, or other sites with useful, relevant content at no charge. For that matter, most of this book is available as a series of posts on my web page, though less edited and comprehensive than the book in your hands. If you have questions or comments, I'll respond to posts there too.

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1 A fundamental belief about beliefs

One of the most important properties of beliefs and models is that they are inherently flawed. Everything you believe—everything *everyone* believes—is, in a sense I'll describe below, wrong.

As unwelcome as this may sound to the uninitiated, it is incredibly liberating. It frees you from having to be right, since you can't be, nor can anyone else. (Recognizing this may reduce the number of I'm-right-you're-wrong arguments you get into.)

Flawed as beliefs are, we can't avoid using them—we can't avoid believing things beyond what our experience allows. The universe is larger and more complex than we can observe or comprehend so we have to make do with simplifications that throw out information based on individual biases. You might say you can never be completely right about anything—not you nor anybody else.

You don't have to feel you're *resigning* yourself to flawed and inconsistent understandings of your world. Whatever you consider your purpose in life, it's not to observe and comprehend *everything* in a universe that stretches billions of light years in all directions into which you can usually see only a few meters.

You probably prefer aiming to live a happy life and leave the world better than you found it or something modest like that. As we've seen, mental models do the job for that, especially if you recognize them as models, not reality themselves.

A fundamental belief about beliefs: ***Beliefs are all flawed; but inevitable***

Think of someone you know well.

Consider this: that person is as complex as you. Their brain and personality are as complex as yours. To know them as well as you know yourself, you'd need another brain, which you don't have. What we think of as knowing someone else usually amounts to simplifying all the complexity of a human into five or ten adjectives. "Bob? He's a great guy. Great sense of humor and always ready to help a friend. A bit of a temper, but down-to-earth."

Needless to say, with simplifications like that, our models of others don't do them justice. And there are billions of other people, plus the rest of the universe. The models we hold in our minds contain a negligible

fraction of the information in the universe.

On top of that, everything in the universe interacts, however indirectly, with everything else. No matter how well you think you know something or how isolated you consider it, other things connect with it. *Everything* else connects with it. Whatever you think you understand, something you didn't think about affects it. You'll find your beliefs wrong in ways you can never predict.

Your simplifications throw out information and introduce individual biases so they differ inconsistently. Your models differ even from your own at different times.

To restate it simply, all your models and everyone else's are wrong in some sense. Even this one.

Yet we do just fine. Again, our life goals are to live a life we want. We evolved to continue living, not to comprehend everything, something people can lose track of in trying to make their models perfect.

How to use models

That all models are flawed while people live happily anyway is incredibly liberating. Instead of worrying about accuracy, you can focus on living the life you want. Instead of arguing who is right, you can accept and celebrate different perspectives, knowing the inevitability of differences between everyone.

Beliefs are valuable for how well they help you live your life. I recommend only evaluating them by that measure and never for accuracy or consistency, except in serving that measure.

If you ever find yourself scrutinizing someone else's beliefs to try to prove them wrong (as you may be doing with mine now), recognize that similar scrutiny would prove yours wrong too. Evaluating models by anything other than how well they work means you're misunderstanding models. When you find yourself arguing against a belief held by people happier or living a more rewarding life than you, you might benefit from remembering you could disprove your models too. Then ask yourself if adopting their model might improve your life too. If so, you can try it out. Trying someone else's model means choosing to believe right something you first believe wrong, which can be hard.

Besides valuing how well models work, since you and your environment changes constantly, I recommend valuing flexibility in your beliefs to reflect that change. When you find a better model than what you're using, feel free to improve your life by choosing to adopt it.

When I use this belief

I use this belief when evaluating models' accuracy or when I catch myself thinking a belief should perfectly represent reality.

What this belief replaces

Old	New
Measuring models by their accuracy	Measuring models by their usefulness in achieving your goals
Accepting other people's standards for your models	Introspecting to understand your values

Where this belief leads

This belief leads to greater flexibility in choosing models and more understanding, acceptance, and appreciation of others' beliefs.

It creates freedom in how you see the world, leading to freedom in how you think and behave.

2 An exercise in knowing your beliefs; so you can change them

We all want to become the Cathedral Builder. We know what makes people Cathedral Builders is their beliefs. We know that beliefs are inherently flawed.

The questions remains

How do you become a Cathedral Builder?

For one thing you don't just wait for it to happen. A Cathedral Builder doesn't believe anything you can't. So becoming a Cathedral Builder starts by believing you can learn skills to change your beliefs.

You do it by learning to **create new beliefs**, to **be flexible about what beliefs you hold**, and to **crowd out counterproductive beliefs**. By counterproductive, I mean counterproductive to your goals, presumably of getting the job done and living a great life.

Start with awareness: The exercise this book is based on

My first step for improving any part of life is awareness. This chapter's exercise will make you aware of your current beliefs.

Here's the exercise:

1. Carry a pen and paper with you for a week.
2. When something triggers you to notice a belief, write it down.

That's it. It costs nothing and takes a few minutes a day. At the end you'll have a list of most of your daily and weekly beliefs. The result of my doing this exercise is in the appendices for reference. I expanded from them to make this book.

To clarify, if the exercise asked you to write what you observed with your senses, you might write something like "My boss walked into the room." But that's not the exercise.

When you write your beliefs, you would instead write, "My boss sucks. I hate working for other people. Bosses make you do things you don't want to."

Very different worlds!

Some beliefs you'll have once in that week. Others you'll have daily. Some more than daily. Some will annoy you. Others will calm you. The

point is to record them without guilt, blame, or judgment—just to record them.

Benefits of this exercise

First, you'll clarify the world you live in—not just the physical world you sense directly, nor the world you consciously *think* you live in, but the world you *actually* believe in.

What's the difference between these worlds?

The physical world of your senses exists, but you only interact with it superficially. You spend your mental effort and base your decisions on the world of your mental models. All the MVIP in your life comes from your models. You can change your beliefs more easily than you can change the world.

Without awareness, change is hard. This exercise creates awareness—a baseline for changing your beliefs. Most people don't realize how much their beliefs affect their perception of their worlds, and therefore they don't know how much their beliefs influence their emotions, motivations, and behaviors.

As a result they make themselves unnecessarily miserable and miss opportunities to improve their lives.

My experience from this exercise and what it means to you

Since my results from doing this chapter's exercise surprised me, I bet your results will surprise you. (Recall I put my results in the appendices.)

How was I surprised?

First, the **quantity** of beliefs I could name surprised me. I expected to write five or ten models that I used a lot. I reached sixty or seventy in just that week, realizing I was finding new ones more easily from the practice. So the mental world I live in seems more complex than I thought.

Next, I was surprised how **new** many were—that is, most of them were less than a few years old. I expected to have more going back to childhood.

I was surprised how **intentional** they are—that is, I *voluntarily created* my most important beliefs. I had *remodeled* my work, relationships, and life. If you're new to models, you'll take time to remodel your life.

I was surprised how much these beliefs **crowded out old ones that made me miserable**. Almost every belief I wrote *improved my life* and made me think of an old belief it replaced *that used to make my life worse*.

Finally I noticed the **overall effect** of all these beliefs I created. With them I created a mental world of

- Calmness
- Understanding

- Responsibility
- Accountability
- Discipline
- Resilience
- Nonreactivity
- Emotional awareness
- Joy
- Love
- Creativity
- Trying new things
- Entrepreneurship

and more. I could summarize all those changes as **emotional intelligence** and **self-awareness**, fundamental to leading yourself and others.

When I look at what it replaced, I see I left a world of low emotional intelligence and self-awareness:

- Complaining
- Reactivity
- Less emotional stability
- Entitlement that went unfulfilled
- Self-righteousness
- Isolation
- Low self-awareness

My life is better today than ever and is improving as fast as I believe it can. I made the changes happen myself, I know how to change more, and *anyone can do what I did*.

I don't want to overstate things. Before adopting many of these recent beliefs, I had already succeeded in external parts of life if not the internal parts. And I'm sure plenty of people live my values today better than I do. I'm sure they live lives by *their values* better than I do. I *hope* you live by your values better than I do, since we have different values.

I found I've become a Cathedral Builder. I've hardly changed the physical world around me, which I only superficially interact with anyway. The lesson of the Cathedral Builder enjoying doing the same work the making-a-living guy despairs of is that the meaning, value, importance, and purpose (MVIP) of things in the physical world comes from one's personal response to it. The MVIP of your work, money, relationships, and all other external things come from your beliefs about them.

When you expose those beliefs to your conscious awareness, which this chapter's exercise does, you understand MVIP of those things. That awareness enables you to change those beliefs and create the MVIP you want, for example creating joy from work where you used to feel despair by believing you are contributing to a greater purpose than just what

you're doing with your hands.

This chapter's exercise showed me I've come to live more by my values, do more, have better professional and personal relationships, and so on. I'm still always looking to improve. You can do the same for yourself in your life—at no cost and needing no one else's help.

Will this exercise make your life perfect? No. In fact, it will create work for you, though you'll love the work when you get the hang of it. The exercise will tell you where you are in important areas and give you direction to improve.

Your life and this exercise

Think about the MVIP you want in your life. MVIP isn't money, travel, family, and other external things. Your head has no physical money in it. That's what *external* means. It only has *thoughts* about it and what it means to you. Same with everything external. No matter how real they are or seem, external things only have MVIP for how you mentally represent them, meaning by what beliefs and models you use. This exercise reveals those beliefs and that meaning.

The next step after understanding your beliefs is to change them, which is what The Model and Method do.

You don't have exactly my values and you don't want to live my life. You have your values and want to live your life. But whatever life you want, you want to live by your values as best you can. If you wanted to be an athlete you'd probably want more competition, drive, exercise, and such. If you're a parent you'd want more familial elements. You know your MVIP better than I do.

Whatever MVIP you want for yourself, this exercise creates awareness. You'll want to replace beliefs that conflict with your goals with new ones that support it. You'll even want to replace beliefs that work for you with beliefs that work *even better* for you.

The rest of this book

This book expands on the beliefs I found for myself in this chapter's exercise. Most chapters are a few pages.

If you want a life of calm understanding like I listed above, you might want to adopt the beliefs yourself. If you want a different world for yourself, you'll still benefit from knowing your beliefs, which will enable you to replace the counterproductive ones with productive ones. Even if you don't like my beliefs and strategies, I think you'll benefit from seeing how someone else replaced theirs.

3 Should you change your beliefs? Or at least consider alternatives?

Let's bring the Cathedral Builder story closer to home.

Imagine going to a party with an old friend you've gone to many parties with before. Sometimes that it happens that your friend finds that party fun while you find it boring. Since you both have similar backgrounds and the party is the same for both of you, how can you account for your different reactions?

Actually, let's highlight things with a hypothetical situation. Instead of the old friend, imagine someone magically made a copy of you just before you walked in identical in every way except the copy had a different belief about this party. You believe it's a party to meet people and your copy believes it's for dancing. You walk in to find the music too loud for talking but great for dancing. Your copy enjoys the party while you find it boring.

Same party. Identical backgrounds and abilities. Different reactions. Why are in different moods and what can you do about it?

Since you and your copy have equal abilities and backgrounds and you're in similar environments, *you probably have different moods because you have different beliefs influencing your perception*. The same environment may look different through lenses of different beliefs.

The solution? Change your beliefs.

Maybe in a specific case like this party you could ask the host to turn down the music, but you can't always change your environment.

The solution of changing your beliefs works in nearly all situations. You could, for example, ask your copy for his or her beliefs and try to adopt them. Or you could figure out beliefs that would work better for you and create them yourself. (I'm not saying to "think positively," to ignore your environment, or to lie to yourself, as I describe in later chapters.

Your life

Instead of your copy at a party or the Cathedral Builder at the quarry, think about anyone anywhere able to create more happiness and emotional reward than you in any situation in life.

If anyone anywhere with equal or less resources than you was able to create MVIP in their lives, you can in yours too. The more you can create MVIP in your life, the more you can create it at your workplace in your colleagues and teammates. The more you do, the more they'll look to you

for leadership, because people love having more MVIP.

That's why people like [Victor Frankl](#) inspire us so much. His book, [Man's Search for Meaning](#), told of finding and creating MVIP in Auschwitz, a situation more challenging than most of us will face. Or [Jean-Dominique Bauby](#), whose best-selling [Diving Bell and the Butterfly](#) told of finding and creating MVIP after a stroke left him with a functioning mind but no voluntary control over his body except to blink one eyelid. If they could find MVIP in Auschwitz and near total paralysis, you can find MVIP in your situation. Or Nelson Mandela, jailed for 27 years, negotiating with world leaders, finishing degrees, and emerging as a world leader himself.

Again, I'm not suggesting believing a lousy party, job, relationship, or anything external is great. I'm saying that if anyone anywhere at any time faced a situation like yours and could enjoy themselves, learn something, or feel better than you in any way, you could adopt their beliefs.

Why consider someone else's beliefs?

This book present beliefs that work for me. Many I consciously adopted. Do I think I have the best beliefs ever? No, but they help me reach my goals, like staying calm under pressure, bringing me great relationships, keeping me fit, and the other things in the last chapter.

You can adopt beliefs that work for you, making you a Cathedral Builder. I'm not writing my beliefs to convince you to adopt them, only to show what worked at least for one person.

If a belief of mine conflicts with yours, you can reject it. But if it applies to part of your life not incredibly awesome, before rejecting it, consider that if you scrutinized your beliefs enough, you'd find reasons to reject them too. As I wrote in chapter 1, all beliefs have flaws, including yours.

More important than how a belief falls apart, since they all do, is *how well it works*.

Instead consider if it could improve your life compared to how your current beliefs affect you. Or consider if yours works better in some areas, it may not work everywhere.

Considering other beliefs helps even if the beliefs don't

If you can make yourself happier, more capable, or whatever you want, why not try?

Even if a model of mine doesn't work for you, I wrote this book to show that anyone can change their beliefs. You don't have to adopt mine to realize that if you're not in absolute heaven. You can change yours and improve your life.

If you have a belief that works better for you, please share it. I'd love to try it and see if it works better for me too.

4 A belief to motivate trying new things

Are you nervous about trying new things? Do you wish you tried more new things? Do you see others enjoying things you're too scared to try?

I found a model that helps me try new things.

The first time I do something, I consider myself successful if I do it at all, not by how well I do it.

My model to try new things: *I have low standards the first time*

People avoid trying new things for various reasons. Fear of judgment is a big one. They don't want to be embarrassed. They want to try singing karaoke but are afraid of judgment. The same with trying a new sport, a new style of clothing, salsa classes, asking someone out, meditating, or whatever.

Another reason is they're afraid of getting hurt. They may avoid trying to ski or skydive, no matter how much they want to do it.

I'm sure you have plenty of reasons to avoid new things you know you want to do.

This model replaces fears of judgment or putting yourself at risk with low, easy-to-surpass standards. When you confidently decide that merely trying something at all is enough, you'll find yourself more eager to do things you've never done before.

So invite people to laugh at your karaoke voice because you consider the mere act of singing a huge success. Apply for that position even if you don't think you'll get it just to experience the interview. Ask out that person because just asking means success for you (not asking means no anyway). Go skiing for the first time and don't worry about getting off the bunny slope.

You get the idea.

When I use the belief

I use the belief when I want to try something new, but am afraid of judgment or failure.

Lately I've used it buying and wearing new clothes, approaching people I didn't know, and working on a new entrepreneurial project.

What this belief replaces

Old	New
Avoiding trying new things	Trying new things

Where this belief leads

This belief leads to trying new activities with less fear.

5 A model for one of the most valuable skills related to beliefs

This book covers *flexibility* with your beliefs—the ability to try out believing something new and letting the new belief crowd out the old one—from several perspectives.

I make a point of undermining beliefs being absolutely right or wrong. It's impossible for our finite brains to handle the effectively infinite information and complexity of the universe, so we can never know absolute right and wrong. As simple as you might think any part of the world, everything influences everything else, so no system is as simple as you might think.

A model for one of the most valuable skills related to beliefs: *Flexibility*

To illustrate the value of flexibility in beliefs, I'll use a case of one of my great historical figures—someone who flipped around a belief about 180 degrees, improved his life, lived by his values, and achieved great feats of leadership.

Growing up I held a few great historical figures in high regard as role models—Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Mandela, and a few others. Eventually I came to see their philosophies significantly deriving from Henry David Thoreau, mainly his short book *Civil Disobedience*. I don't know how much they value the book but I've read they said his influence was significant.

Thoreau wrote the book after he felt his government's support of slavery and the Mexican-American war forced him to stop paying taxes, unable to swallow supporting either. They jailed him. In jail he came to consider himself more free and honorable in the jail than out—a complete turnaround from the government's intent.

I don't intend to take a side as to whether he was right or wrong—but his flexibility in his beliefs was great enough to make his punishment feel like freedom and honor, and this flexibility helped make him an influential figure. We can learn from that.

Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison. The proper place to-day, the only place which Massachusetts has provided

for her freer and less desponding spirits, is in her prisons, to be put out and locked out of the State by her own act, as they have already put themselves out by their principles. It is there that the fugitive slave, and the Mexican prisoner on parole, and the Indian come to plead the wrongs of his race, should find them; on that separate, but more free and honorable ground, **where the State places those who are not with her, but against her—the only house in a slave State in which a free man can abide with honor.**

This passage beautifully illustrates how flexibility in beliefs creates influence lasting centuries to some of history's great leaders. Not many of us will achieve so much, and not likely by avoiding paying taxes, but we can learn the value of flexibility in influencing others and practice it.

When we change our beliefs we can motivate ourselves to do more than we could otherwise. It also helps us learn how to influence others' beliefs. When we influence others' beliefs, we can motivate them far more than we could otherwise.

When I use this belief

I use this belief when a belief isn't helping me achieve my or my team's goals.

What this belief replaces

Old	New
Getting stuck in seeing things one way when it isn't helping us	Changing our beliefs, which changes how we perceive the world

Where this belief leads

This belief leads to greater ability to influence ourselves and others. It can make a jail sentence feel like freedom and honor and more.

6 About the author

Joshua Spodek, PhD MBA, wrote the bestselling [Leadership Step by Step](#), hosts the award-winning [Leadership and the Environment](#) podcast, is a professor and coach of entrepreneurship and leadership at NYU and Columbia Business School, and is a columnist for Inc.

He speaks on entrepreneurship and leadership at institutions such as Boston Consulting Group, IBM, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Children's Aid Society, the NY Public Library, Harvard, Princeton, West Point, MIT, Stanford, Berkeley, INSEAD, the NY Academy of Science, and more.

He holds five Ivy League degrees, including a PhD in astrophysics and an MBA from Columbia, where he studied under a Nobel Laureate and helped build an X-ray satellite with the European Space Agency and NASA.

He left academia to market his invention—a technology to show motion pictures to moving subways—installing displays on four continents. He holds six patents. He also founded two education ventures.

He has been called “best and brightest” (Esquire Genius issue), “rocket scientist” (Forbes, ABC), and “astrophysicist turned new media whiz” (NBC)

His clients include venture founders and employees of McKinsey, Bain, BCG, Deloitte, JP Morgan Chase, Google, IBM, Proctor & Gamble, ExxonMobil, and the US Navy and Army, as well as graduates of Harvard, MIT, Stanford, Cornell, Princeton, Indian Institute of Technology, the US Naval Academy, and others.

He has appeared in ABC, CBS, NBC, NPR, Fox, CNN, NY Times, Wall Street Journal, USA Today, Washington Post, Forbes, Esquire, Entrepreneur, Nikkei Shimbun, and South China Morning Post.

As an artist he has installed public works in Bryant Park (NYC), Union Square (NYC), and Amsterdam's Dam Square. He has had solo shows in New York and group shows nationwide, including Art Basel Miami Beach. He studied Meisner Technique at the William Esper Studio. He has taught art at Parsons and NYU-Tisch.

He finished six marathons (3:51 best), competed at Nationals and Worlds in Ultimate, including the first tournament in North Korea. He swam across the Hudson River, did over 110,000 burpees, wrote over 3,000 blog posts, took over 300 cold showers, and jumped out of two airplanes. He has lived in Ahmedabad (India), Paris, and Shanghai. He lives in Greenwich Village and blogs at joshuaspedek.com.

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