

LIMINAL THINKING

Create the change you want by changing the way you think

A book by Dave Gray. Available through many online booksellers.

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(SK marks my reflections of Dave's ideas. – Sue K)



Why do some people succeed at change while others fail? It's the way they think! Liminal thinking is the art of creating change by understanding, shaping, and reframing beliefs. What beliefs are stopping you right now?

You have a choice. You can create the world you want or live in a world created by others. If you are ready to stop making excuses and start making changes, read on.

No matter who you are or what your situation is, some change is always possible. If there's a situation in the world you want to change, liminal thinking can help.

Beliefs form the basis of everything people say, think, and do. When people change their beliefs, they change their behavior, which changes their lives.

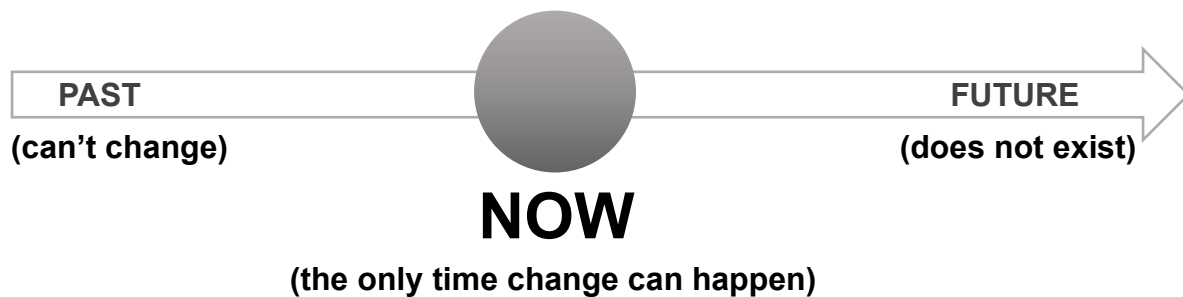
Liminal comes from a Latin word that means *threshold*. A threshold is a doorway; the beginning of a journey; a boundary that marks a point of transition between one state and another.

SK: *Reentry is a liminal time. Quiet, reflective time can be very difficult to find in our busy world. Now might be a great time to learn these new skills!*

WHEN IS A GOOD TIME TO CREATE CHANGE?

There is no time like right now. In fact, the only place that change is possible is NOW.

A moment in time.



Liminal thinking is a set of skills that anyone can learn.

You do not need any formal authority, budget, or official sanction to practice liminal thinking.

If you can learn 6 principles and 9 practices, you will be able to minimize reality distortion, improve understanding, and open up possibilities. Liminal thinking is a kind of mindfulness that enables you to create positive change.

Three Simple Precepts

1. Get in touch with your ignorance.
2. Seek understanding.
3. Do something different.

"The only constant is change."

- Heraclitus 500 BCE

Six Principles

These six principles constitute a theory of beliefs: how they come into being, why they are necessary, how they are reinforced over time, and why people cling to their beliefs, even when they are incomplete, obsolete, or invalid. They are beliefs about beliefs.

1. Beliefs are models. Beliefs seem like perfect representations of the world, but in fact they are imperfect models for navigating a complex, multidimensional, unknowable reality.

2. Beliefs are created. Beliefs are constructed hierarchically, using theories and judgments, which are based on selected facts and personal, subjective experiences.

3. Beliefs create a shared world. Beliefs are the psychological material we use to co-create a shared world, so we can live, work, and do things together. Changing a shared world requires changing its underlying beliefs.

4. Beliefs create blind spots. Beliefs are tools for thinking and provide rules for action, but they can also create artificial constraints that blind you to valid possibilities.

5. Beliefs defend themselves. Beliefs are unconsciously defended by a bubble of self-sealing logic, which maintains them even when they are invalid, to protect personal identity and self-worth.

6. Beliefs are tied to identity. Governing beliefs, which form the basis for other beliefs, are the most difficult to change, because they are tied to personal identity and feelings of self-worth. You can't change your governing beliefs without changing yourself.

Nine Practices

Nine practices to help you minimize reality distortion, envision possibilities, and create positive change. These practices are based on **six principles**, which constitute a theory of beliefs.

1. Assume that you are not objective. If you're part of the system you want to change, you're part of the problem.

2. Empty your cup. You can't learn new things without letting go of old things. Stop, look, and listen. Suspend judgment. What's going on?

3. Create safe space. If you don't understand the underlying need, nothing else matters. People will not share their innermost needs unless they feel safe, respected, and accepted for who they are.

4. Triangulate and validate. Look at situations from as many points of view as possible. Consider the possibility that seemingly different or contradictory beliefs may be valid. If something doesn't make sense to you, then you're missing something.

5. Ask questions, make connections. Try to understand people's hopes, dreams and frustrations. Explore the social system and make connections to create new opportunities.

6. Disrupt routines. Many beliefs are embedded in habitual routines that run on autopilot. If a routine is a problem, disrupt the routine to create new possibilities.

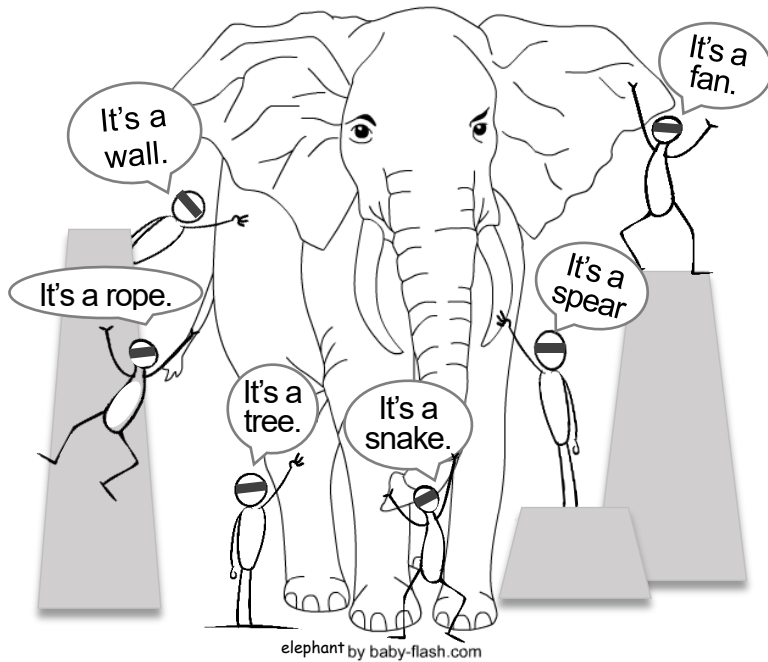
7. Act as-if in the here-and-now. You can test beliefs even if you don't believe they are true. All you need to do is act as if they were true and see what happens. If you find something that works, do more of it.

8. Make sense with stories. If you give people facts without a story, they will explain it within their existing belief system. The best way to promote a new or different belief is not with facts, but with a story.

9. Evolve yourself. If you can be open about how change affects you personally, you have a better chance of achieving your aims. To change the world, you must be willing to change yourself.

A parable about beliefs (SK)

The elephant and the blindfolded people.



There is an old story about blind men encountering an elephant which I'm modernizing a bit here. In my story we have a group of people who, amazingly, have never learned about elephants. They put on blindfolds and odor-eliminating masks. They each stand in a different spot in the room and then they are asked: **"What is an elephant like?"** Each one says something different: "It is like a spear!" says the one touching the tusk. "It is like a tree!" says the person with their arms around its leg. "No, it is like a fan." says the third, flapping the ear. The fourth person says "It is like a rope. I can swing from it!" The fifth person disagrees. "No, it's not like a rope, it is more like a large snake." Finally, the last person says: "Why are all of you saying those things? It is a huge flat surface. It is a wall!" Then a passionate debate ensues.

SK: Long before we learned to ask "why?," we were building our beliefs and our emotions through our experiences, and our senses. We've continued to construct our beliefs and our emotions throughout our lifetime, mostly without our awareness. Our feelings about our version of reality are so strong that we often believe that our truth is the truth.



We are like the blindfolded people. We can speak our truth, but when we're with others, we might hear competing and conflicting truths! This happens everywhere in society, all the time. No two people see a tree the same way. And when a tree is not present, and people talk about the idea of a tree, the difference between their perspectives increases greatly.

Knowing that we see trees differently is easy to understand, but when we talk about deep beliefs that we have about ourselves as persons in the world, the conversation gets tough.

LIMINAL THINKING REQUIRES COURAGE.

Governing beliefs form the foundation of your (version of) reality. They generate feelings of self-worth, group identity, and social stability. They give order and meaning to life. When you feel that your governing beliefs are threatened, it's like you yourself, are being threatened.

The deeper you go, the scarier it gets, but at the same time, the greater the potential for change. When your beliefs are being threatened and your instinct says "defend the belief," you need to go toward that fear if you want to open the door to lasting change.

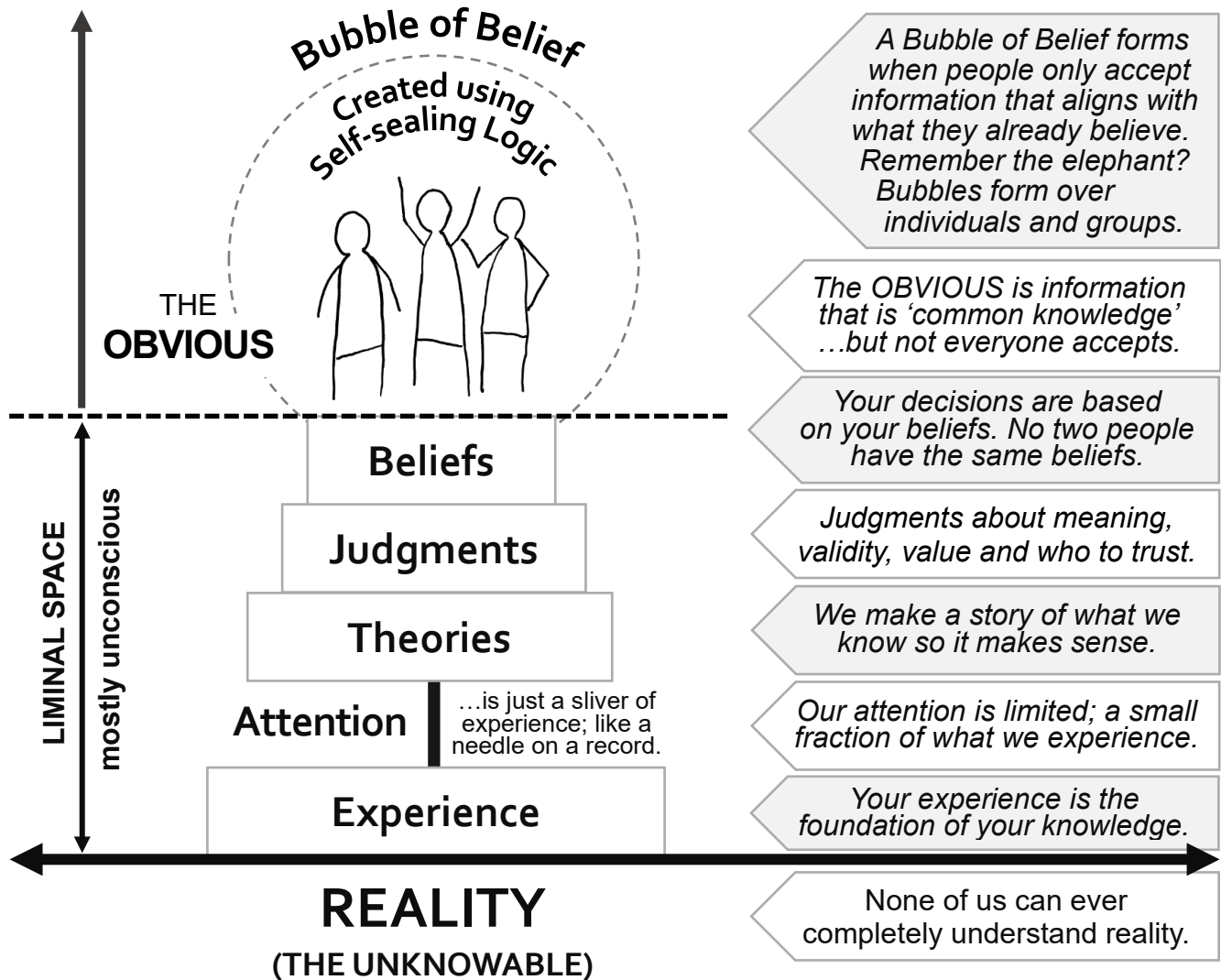
A truly significant change to your world will almost always require some kind of corresponding change to yourself.

"Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

- James Baldwin

Pyramid of Belief

SK: We construct our beliefs layer by layer, over time, based on our experience of reality. We experience just a tiny slice of reality – pictured below - and what we pay attention to is just a tiny slice of that. From that limited amount of information we create theories, judgments and, finally, our beliefs. To shed limiting beliefs, modify old beliefs, or create new beliefs, we could expand our experience (try new things!), move our needle of attention, and/or learn about other people's beliefs.



Liminal thinking is a lot of work! Why would anyone do these uncomfortable things?

Because it matters. It matters because YOU matter. You owe it to yourself to be a whole, self-actualized person. It matters because the people who are close to you matter. They deserve to be understood, even when they disagree.

SK: And our future together matters. Building relationships, community, our nation and our world requires working through disagreements. Liminal thinking will help you, and it can help all of us.

"We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them."

- Albert Einstein



To learn more from the small and mighty book **LIMINAL THINKING: Create the change you want by changing the way you think**, ask for it in the library, or the free books suppliers, or purchase your copy from your usual bookstore.

