

The Power of Your Thoughts, as a Leader

I am fascinated by just how easily most of us dismiss the power of thoughts. How, more often than not, we are unaware of what we are thinking or believing at any given time - and therefore also unaware of the tremendous impact those thoughts and beliefs can have in the way our jobs, our careers, and our lives unfold.

Take for example an incident I experienced while I was living and working in Poland a little over 20 years ago. I was a brand leader at Procter & Gamble ("P&G"), and it was an amazing time to be in that part of the world. Not long after the wall had fallen in Berlin, I had been tasked with helping to establish P&G's Eastern European operations. My job was to launch and grow key brands and to develop people. Given the circumstances at that time in history, "leading people" essentially meant teaching ex-communists to be capitalists. (What an experience that was!)

On this particular morning, I was rushing to get to the office for an important meeting that was scheduled to start at 9 a.m. Due to bad traffic, I arrived ten minutes late - and I hate to be late! So, I rushed straight into my office, grabbed the materials I needed, and headed to the conference room to join the meeting already in progress.

Two hours later, as I returned to my office, I found one of my direct reports, Nadia, waiting for me.

Based on her red nose, large, swollen eyes, and facial tissues she was clutching in her hand, it was obvious that Nadia had been crying - a lot.

By way of background, Nadia was my shining star - one of the smartest, most capable and enjoyable team members I had. She embraced a positive attitude and was always focused on winning.

But "that" Nadia was not the clearly upset, nose-blowing Nadia who sat in my office that morning.

I immediately pulled up a chair across from her, sat down, leaned in, and said, "Nadia, what's wrong?"

Through her tears, she managed to get the words out, "Why are you firing me?"

I was shocked. "What?" I replied.

"Why are you firing me?" she repeated.

I was dumbfounded. Where was this coming from?

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As it turns out, in communist-Poland times, if a boss was going to fire someone, the boss would walk past that person on the morning they were to be fired, without saying hello.

In my attempt to get to my meeting on time, I had apparently rushed right by Nadia and had not even realized it.

The result? Nadia had read that as a sign of her impending unemployment - resulting in her losing an entire morning due to confusion, panic, disappointment, and grief.

I learned so much from that experience (for one thing, focus on *relationships* more than *tasks*!). Mainly, this incident illustrated for me *just how important ingrained beliefs are*. Think about it: All that turmoil for Nadia was caused by one single belief - just one simple thought.

And what had "really" happened? I had simply walked by Nadia without saying anything (I honestly hadn't noticed her!). It was the *interpretation* of that action - the belief that Nadia held about that action - which caused her an entire morning of angst.

Does this sound familiar to you? Have you ever heard something secondhand at work - you either misunderstood what you heard, or what you were told was misrepresented - and, as a result, you were full of worry, upset, anger... only to find out later that you were completely mistaken?

As leaders on the job, we are being driven by hundreds of assumptions every single day, and they can often steer us incorrectly.

It all comes down to the way we *think* as leaders - the underlying ingrained beliefs we have. And these beliefs are fueling us all day, every day. They impact the way we feel, which in turn impacts the actions we take, and - ultimately - drives the outcomes we get.

Yet we often ignore thoughts and beliefs, simply because they are *intangible*. In general, we pay more attention to behaviors and words. "But those are just thoughts," clients will tell me. "It's what I say or do that matters most, right?"

No. I believe we underestimate and underutilize the tremendous power and the amazing impact that our thoughts and beliefs carry.

So, if you are not already doing so, as a coach I encourage you to watch your thoughts like a hawk - and with *objective curiosity*. Look at what you are thinking as if you were an objective outsider, as if they were not "your" thoughts. Is what you are thinking really serving you? If not, choose to change those thoughts. Because what you think - and believe - is ultimately driving the outcomes you get. And that is what will help you be a better self-leader and a greater leader of others, which of course will help you build a strong brand as a leader on the job.

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Through coaching, keynote speaking, and delivering corporate learning programs, Brenda brings her many years of transformational coaching successes, insights, examples, and real-world stories to the rewarding task of helping leaders reach their full potential.

After earning her MBA from Harvard Business School, Brenda spent a large part of her career as an executive in *Fortune* 100 multinationals, building brands across dozens of countries spanning four continents. Now, as President of Brenda Bence International, she travels the world speaking, training, and coaching individuals and companies to greater success through a unique, creative, and practical combination of leadership and branding. Visit www.BrendaBence.com.

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