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## Commitment vs. Trying

*Try not. Do... or do not. There is no try. – Yoda, Stars Wars*

*The irony of commitment is that it's deeply liberating -- in work, in play, in love. – Anne Morriss*

Following through on commitments vs. trying to make them happen gives us the power to change. It builds confidence and self-trust. Once we explore our underlying beliefs and what we are truly committed to we have choices. We may decide to change it or not. The point is that by identifying our belief and what we are committed to, we have the power to change. The choice is now in our hands and we no longer risk living as a 'victim' of life.

We are always committed to something. There is never a time, not even a split second when we are not committed. Now, this is a bold statement, so let's test it. You might say, "What about when I'm lying on the sofa watching television? I'm not committed to anything then." But consider that this is exactly what you are committed to at that very moment: lying on the sofa watching television.

If we dig a little deeper, there is an underlying belief at work here.

Consider this scenario: It is Saturday afternoon and Jane has a stack of work to complete by Monday. She knows that to finish it on time, she will need to work on it all weekend. Instead, she is lying on the sofa watching television. Jane can't understand why she has to work on weekends and she resents it. She really does not like the company she works for and believes her manager is uncaring.

What might be her underlying, in fact, her true commitment at that moment?

Just reading this scenario and 'listening' to what is being said and not said, there are infinite possible commitments underlying Jane's actions. These include a commitment she has not consciously chosen, driven by an underlying belief unknown to Jane.

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Until such beliefs are uncovered, explored and reframed they will drive our actions. We may find creative reasons or rationalizations for why we lie on the sofa and they seem so “true.” We make sure we have friends around us who agree with our reasons: "Oh, I know, it's terrible the way they make you do all the work. You deserve a break."

There is a lot of power in being honest about why we do things the way we do. This is key to living a happy and fulfilling life. Socrates said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” By examining the behaviours that we engage in and then discerning the beliefs behind them, we can actively decide whether these are the beliefs we really want in our lives, chose to adopt new ones and commit to them.

The opposite of living an examined life could be considered living as a “victim of life”. In short, believing that situations, events and people are the reason we cannot achieve. However, if one is not living a life that they have consciously chosen, but are allowing life to carry them along like a piece of driftwood bobbing on the ocean waves, then they are not choosing the life that they want.

If one does not know what they are truly committed to then, others will often dictate their commitments.

Below the surface of our conscious mind lay a whole range of underlying beliefs. These are the beliefs we have about others and ourselves. They may be beliefs that someone gave us, our parents for example or the culture and community we grew up in. These beliefs sit below the surface of our consciousness in our subconsciousness. The only way we can know what they are is by observing ourselves and seeing what causes us to do certain things. The more we know about these hidden beliefs the more we succeed we will be in re-committing to new beliefs and take new actions.

Case Study: Amy and George were working on creating a new business. They were choosing a name for their business, determining their market, and designing stationery and other administrative tasks. The website was one of the bigger projects. They had to decide on a design, approach, the technology needed and the products to sell. Each week Amy and George would get together to discuss their business projects. Each week every aspect of the project was flying forward except for the website. Amy and George decided that the website would need to take a backseat as they worked on other related aspects of the project.

Over several months the business was getting closer to launching yet still no website. There was some hold up with the designers, the IT company, and their marketing company. As hard as they tried, it seemed as though it would never happen. Amy and George sat down for another meeting about the website. They looked at each other in a very frustrated way. They began to go over the long list of incomplete tasks related to the website. Then Amy stopped the meeting and asked George if he was committed to creating the business. He agreed he was and then asked Amy the same question. She also said she was committed. The next question they asked each other was why they were getting stuck in moving forward with the website. They found that neither of them was particularly interested in the website. They knew they needed it for the business but they didn't have any particular experience or interest in this area.

Both George and Amy were committed to the business but they weren't committed to doing the tasks involved in getting the website finished. They realised this task was taking a lot of their energy and they had to resolve this quickly. So they decided to ask a business colleague, who builds websites, to be involved in this part of the project. They spoke to their colleague and he came on board straight away, excited by the whole idea. He quickly outlined the time frame they would be working towards.

At the end of the conversation, both Amy and George gave a huge sigh of relief. Now they could work to their strengths and grow their new business and their colleague could build the website.

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The above case study gives us some insight into the meaning of commitment. Many times we carry out tasks that we are not committed to and then wonder why we aren't progressing. It may be that we need to reframe our perspective and see the task in a whole new way to align with it our commitments as Amy and George did.

**Let us look at what happens when we don't understand our underlying beliefs.**

As a child and young adult, you were likely in a number of systems or activities that compared you to others. It may have been a sporting or social group, your school, family, church or other groups.

In these groups, people are often compared to one another. So you may have heard messages such as 'the other children are really good at this, why aren't you?' or 'Can't you try harder, you take longer than anyone else.'

All of these adjectives are comparative adjectives. Smarter, harder, better, fitter, cooler – all these words are based around comparing someone with someone else. We may have heard these messages once or a million times. Over time this belief sits in your subconscious, like a conductor, orchestrating your life. Once you began committing to this belief, a long time ago, you created a world around you that confirmed this belief. You may have fought hard not to notice it but this is still actually believing in it, or you may have given into it and carried out your life reinforcing it.

Consider this: Something in your life just keeps on going wrong. No matter what you do, you just can't make it happen. It frustrates you and you start to doubt what you can do. You feel like giving up. You question why you can't be smarter, better, and all the other comparative adjectives. You could decide at this point to give up on yourself and not believe in who you are, you could deny this is happening to you and convince yourself that this was the wrong thing for you or you could explore how and what beliefs, thoughts or ideas are operating that got you to this point in time.

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## Self Application

Often one takes the first two options. The last option can feel insurmountable and fraught with uncertainty about where to begin or where it will take us. Instead, we might decide to try another project as you are sure this time it will be the right one. However, we're likely to use the criteria for this decision that led to unsatisfactory results. If there is little or no exploration of the beliefs that lie below the surface of conscious thought, that drive one's actions, then using the same criteria used in the past commits us to reinforce beliefs that do not support our goals or vision.

The process may look like this:

I weigh up all the reasons for taking this step and convince myself that it is for the best. I don't ask myself how I feel about this step. I may even ignore feelings. Slowly I am convinced it is the right way to go forward and I'm sold on the idea or at least my inner critic is. Once again I have convinced myself of all the reasons why it didn't work out. The areas I convince myself most about are those involving something or someone I have little control over. I start to blame the market, the people on the task, anyone or anything that I can use to scapegoat. Then I choose another project. Explaining once again all the reasons why this one is finally the one – I just know it.

Throughout this process, self-esteem begins to erode along with self-respect and self-love maybe even reaching a point where you don't believe in yourself anymore. Your life is now about committing to a belief that does not serve you.

## Choosing Uncertainty or Certainty

It is again at this point that you can either choose uncertainty or certainty. Certainty meaning you are certainly doing the same thing over again will result in the same unfulfilling outcomes and uncertainty meaning exploration and reflection of what is true and empowered beliefs you want to adopt.

This could lead to a renewed commitment to learning more about yourself and what makes you uniquely you. You commit to being successful. You no longer compare yourself with others. You may realise that committing to this project represents a new way of going forward in your life. You recognise that to achieve this you need support. And when your past beliefs show up, you are ready. You are aware of them and their limitations and take action to address them.

## Call a Friend or Your Coach

Take time to think and let the moment pass. Then go back to your plan, look at your vision, see the vision of where you are going. Check in to see if your actions are aligned with your plan. Actions that are in alignment are a good indication your commitment is aligned with where you want to go. Look at what you have achieved so far. Acknowledge yourself. Think about all the areas of your life that you are grateful for since you began working on your plan. Feel your energy shift. Recommit to your plan and check in right at this moment with how you are feeling.

## "Trying is Lying!"

Consider the example of former South African President, Nelson Mandela who spent 27 years in prison. He was once asked how he could forgive his captors. He replied: "I realised one day, breaking rocks, that they could take everything away from me, everything, but my mind and heart. Now, those things I would have to give away, and I simply decided I would not give them away." Even in a prison, Mandela found choices to make; choices that showed a commitment to freedom, to love, to independence and to moving forward. It showed a commitment to himself.

If we are only trying to commit to ourselves then we are not living in awareness. Trying is when we keep a small percentage available to us for failure so we feel okay when it happens. However, this means we are committing to failure rather than success. If you feel and know that the path forward is the right one then you can more easily and fully commit to it. Any percentage allocated to failure means you are still uncertain and there are doubt and doubt will become the focus - seeking reasons to doubt along the way leading to further doubt.

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Trying + Doubt = Failure

Commitment + Action = Success

It is not uncommon to feel doubtful about success or fearful the failure. However, if you commit to your vision, which is aligned with your values and what you truly want, during times of doubt or even failure, you are more likely to view these as learning opportunities and keep moving forward.

It is not possible to be committed to everything. A list of priorities can help commitments stay on track. And avoid feelings of anxiety, stress, guilt and overwhelm. Such a list helps us to make important choices. Trying to commit to everything is often based on an underlying belief of scarcity or unworthiness - being unable to say no, not wanting to let others down, scared that saying no may mean missing an opportunity. Scarcity says, "This will never come along again so I better to grab it."

Commitment leaves no room for doubt, error, or subscribing to other people's values, these are signs of trying. Commitment translates into taking action and action produces a result.

## Reflection

1. List the number one priority in your life that you are committed to right now.
2. What do you see about this commitment? How have you decided this is your primary commitment?
3. Who is your support team? Do you believe in them and trust them to support you?
4. What are the ways in which your support team can support you?

## Coaching Application

As you work with your client you will need to support them in understanding what they want to commit to. This process will take time and is driven by the client. For the coach, this is an opportunity to explain the importance of having a vision, goals to work towards and an awareness of their true beliefs. A coach's role is not to determine what beliefs are best for their client but rather the importance of aligning the client's beliefs with their pathway forward.

Coaching is helping someone develop themselves and a plan that supports this development. When working with a client, be alert to their language. A client's use of language will give you great insight into their beliefs, how committed they are and also how their language supports their success and not their failure.

## Structures

One way to support clients is to invite them to investigate whether or not their actions are aligned with their goals or vision. If actions are aligned with goals, then there is commitment. For example, if a client says they are committed to spending time with their children and they end up spending 100 hours a week at work, then there is evidence they are only trying" vs. committing to spending time with their family.

Creating a structure to support a client's commitment can be a useful part of the coaching conversation. However, notice if or when you are trying to put in place structures for your client. This indicates the coach is owning the path forward not the client. The coach is committed to the journey of the client but the client may not be. If the coach is holding the baton running forward then the client is left behind or waiting up ahead to catch it. No matter what the outcome of the client's journey, it will not be successful if the coach is holding the baton.

## Reflection

1. What commitment do you really want to make about your coaching practice?
2. What structures are you going to put in place to make sure that you fulfil your new powerful commitment?
3. How can you support your client when you notice that their level of commitment is slipping?

## Resource

[www.nelsonmandela.org](http://www.nelsonmandela.org)