

## Creators of our own outcomes

By Ruth Ostrow

**Life is a self-fulfilling prophecy. I've just lived through a stunning example. A colleague with whom I've stayed friends over the years suddenly developed a theory that I didn't value him any more. This didn't come from any external "reality", but rather a sad construct in his head based on an insecure patch he was having.**

He then acted with disdain towards me, not returning calls, being rude when we were together and basically giving me a hard time. Not being privy to the workings of his mind, I just assumed he'd decided he no longer wanted my friendship.

Without further ado, I altered my behaviour to accommodate this new environment, finding myself withdrawn in his presence and becoming more and more aloof. This gave him all the evidence he needed. "You see!" he told mutual friends. "She never came up to say hello at X's party; she snubbed me in the street. She has discarded me without a second thought!"

Being a psychology junkie, I forced him to process our issues, and it transpired that he'd been riddled with negative thoughts about many things owing to a period of profound self-doubt. He presumed no one valued him because he'd stopped valuing himself. Had we not spoken, I would have walked away, which would have validated his initial belief.

In the corporate world, this process is taught as the virtuous (or unvirtuous) cycle. Drawn as a triangle, belief or presumption triggers behaviour that creates an outcome, which then reinforces the original belief. It's such a simple yet profound theory.

We all live this way. Try believing: "My boss thinks I'm a great employee!" Every time you see that boss you'll smile, chest out, perform better because you feel valued, and hence create your own positive outcome, which will validate your initial belief as part of this virtuous cycle.

Now try it the other way around regardless of reality. Shoulders folded in, with a resentful attitude, you'll feel anxious, triggering a sluggish performance and bad outcome as you meet with disapproving stares on your downward spiral.

In life it's often our beliefs and unconscious fears that drive reality rather than the other way around. Although most of us believe we are victims of circumstance, we are often the unknowing creators of our own outcomes. This story has a happy ending, but it is a gentle reminder worth sharing. Be careful what you presume and try not to make up unhelpful stories.

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