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Coaching Standard 4.2: Tackling Limiting Beliefs

Coaching Theory Piece for APOC (2022-2023)

**OLEVI | The International Centre for
Leadership in Teaching & Learning**

High Performing People,
Transforming Cultures



Articulate achievements and embed learning

Coaching Standard 4.2: You expose and tackle both empowering and limiting beliefs, developing awareness, self-belief, and a determination to succeed.

Why is this standard important?

Coaches need to be able to work with the whole person, especially the coachee's values, beliefs and assumptions they hold about themselves and the world around them.

Some beliefs are barriers to achieving one's goals because they are so powerful in shaping people's actions, behaviours, and successes. These are known as limiting beliefs.

Example of a limiting belief	So therefore I ...
"Everything I do has to be perfect"	become risk averse
"I cannot handle conflict"	give in to others
"This work is easy for me"	rush and make mistakes
"I have heard this all before"	do not listen and learn from others

A coach's role is to listen carefully and pick up on the beliefs that their coachee is continually telling themselves. Sometimes those beliefs are so fixed that a person does not even know those beliefs are present. Once those beliefs and assumptions have been identified, the coach will help their coachee gain a better understanding of the accuracy of those beliefs. Being more aware of our beliefs and assumptions is empowering, especially when we begin to question and challenge them. By knowing where we are and what is holding us back, we can do something about it. This clarity can create confidence and drive to achieve. Too often, coaches do three things that keep coaching a shallow experience and thus limits its effectiveness.

1. The coach might not have built a safe and trusting relationship with their coachee for honest conversations to take place.
2. The coach does not explore peoples' values as this can feel too personal and too hard to tackle for some coaches.
3. The coach purely focuses on the behaviours they see (or do not see) rather than exploring the reasons for this behaviour.

What does this standard mean?

A belief is a conviction that we generally accept to be true, often without actual evidence or proof. They are the assumptions we have about the world and about ourselves; and our values, attitudes, and behaviours are greatly influenced by these beliefs. Beliefs grow from different sources. They can stem from the formative people we spend time with, and what we see, hear, read, and experience. Whilst they are designed to keep us safe, they do not always help us to succeed. Three types of beliefs are important for us to understand:

- **Limiting Beliefs:** These are beliefs that hold people back, e.g. *change is a bad thing*. Here, the coach's role is to challenge the thinking behind these beliefs.
- **Empowering Beliefs:** These are beliefs that push people forward, e.g. *mistakes help me learn*. Here, the coach's role is to shift people to have more empowering beliefs.
- **Over-empowering Beliefs:** Occasionally, empowering beliefs do not serve people well. They give people an inaccurate view of their own expertise and thus stop them listening, learning, or changing (thus become limiting beliefs).

The role of the coach is two-fold:

1. Identify or expose a coachee's beliefs, ensuring people understand and accept this is a feeling, and not based on reality.
2. Work through a coachee's beliefs, accepting the reality and reframing beliefs into ones that empower, build confidence or self-belief. If people believe in themselves more, they think their goals are more likely to be achieved. This is motivating which creates productive action and a determination to succeed

HOW do coaches do this effectively?

STEP 1: IDENTIFY BELIEFS

Choose one or two beliefs to focus upon and ask your coachee to reflect on the impact that these limiting beliefs have on their resultant behaviours. By recognising how these beliefs manifest, your coachee builds up their self-awareness.

STEP 2: CONSIDER ORIGINS

Your coachees need to reflect on the origins of their limiting beliefs. By looking into the root causes and questioning them, coachees will realise that the evidence they have previously used to justify these beliefs is sometimes flawed, limited and circumstantial. These questions could be helpful for a coach to use:

- ✓ *Where do you think that belief came from?*
- ✓ *Who was instrumental in helping set up and shape that belief?*
- ✓ *What were their motives? Do you trust and respect them?*
- ✓ *Why was that belief formed at the time?*
What was the reasoning and context?
Was it helping to protect you?

STEP 3: REFLECT ON ITS FLAWS

If your coachee's limiting beliefs are deeply entrenched, coaches may find that coachees reinforce current or past events as further 'proof' that they are true. An important part of the coach's work is to help their coachees consider times when their belief has not been true. This might involve questioning any generalisations, deletions, or distortions, then by re-evaluating the 'evidence', a coachee can begin to redress this balance. These questions could be helpful for a coach to use:

- ✓ *You said, 'they do not listen to you'. Tell me who does listen to you?*
- ✓ *When have you not been 'disorganised'? When has your class not been 'badly behaved'? Does this always happen every day in every lesson?*
- ✓ *What might your 'best friend' or 'line manager' say to counter that belief?*

STEP 4: EXPLORE ALTERNATIVES

Your coachee should be encouraged to create more supportive and empowering beliefs. Coaches should ask coachees about the behaviours they want to exemplify, and then think about what beliefs would best serve them in doing this, thus creating valuable affirmations. These questions could be helpful for a coach to use:

- ✓ *What words or phrases could you use to change or tweak this belief to one that is positive and compelling?*
- ✓ *What belief could you create to challenge that 'false' belief?*
- ✓ *Who would you be without that thought/belief?*

STEP 5: CHALLENGE REOCCURRING THOUGHTS

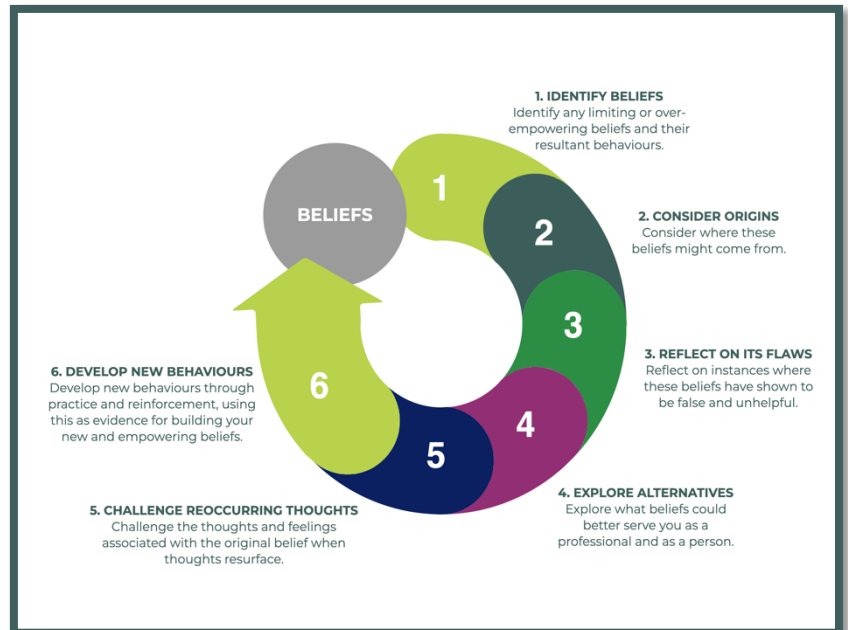
Encourage your coachee to watch out for when their old beliefs/thoughts reoccur. When this happens, encourage them to challenge them with their new belief and the evidence associated with it. These questions could be helpful for a coach to use:

- ✓ *When this situation arises, how will you ensure you challenge your old beliefs?*
- ✓ *Let's stop for a moment. Can you notice what assumptions you are thinking here?*
- ✓ *Remember, what evidence did you find to provoke a different belief?*

STEP 6: DEVELOP NEW BEHAVIOURS

Encourage your coachee to undertake actions that are aligned to the new behaviours your coachee wishes to develop. These actions do not need to be 'perfect' but achievements should be reflected upon and celebrated. Actions should be used as evidence to prove the coachee's new more empowering beliefs. Also, your coachee should use their achievements to reflect upon how the old beliefs are outdated and no longer valid.

- ✓ *What are you going to do next? How are you going to make sure it's a success?*
- ✓ *I am glad you have moved forward. How does this reinforce your new belief?*
- ✓ *How does this help disprove your old belief?*



Golden Nuggets

