



WHITEPAPER

**THE INVISIBLE BARRIER:  
HOW UNCONSCIOUS  
LIMITING BELIEFS  
UNDERMINE SALES**



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# HUMANS ARE NOT LOGICAL

We think we are, but the science says otherwise.

In general, we make decisions based on complex interactions among a large number of non-rational factors, including emotions, hormones, cognitive biases, and unconscious beliefs. We then justify the decision with logic.

This only feels untrue to us because our brains have a sophisticated and lightning-fast system for making us believe our own justifications.

The good news is that many of these unconscious and non-rational processes are actually supportive of our success. The bad news is that some of them are not.

**In this paper, we discuss one type of un-supportive subconscious pattern, called a limiting belief. We'll take you through the definition, discuss the 3 types of limiting beliefs, introduce 13 limiting beliefs that commonly impact sales, and finally show you how to overcome limiting beliefs on your sales teams.**



# WHAT IS A LIMITING BELIEF?

A limiting belief is a type of core belief that inhibits a person's ability to achieve what they want to achieve. Core beliefs are generally formed in early childhood, though they can develop later. They can include supportive beliefs like, "I am loved," and "I am good at math," or unsupportive beliefs like, "I am weak," and "I am no good at English."

Unsupportive core beliefs are also called "limiting beliefs," because they limit your ability to find fulfillment in that aspect of your life. The core belief that you are weak, for instance, might prevent you from bothering to exercise and build your strength, which in turn might prevent you from participating in activities you wish you could participate in, or from remaining healthy enough to do other things you like to do.

Limiting beliefs tend to be self-protective, which means that our unconscious minds act to make reality match our belief. This, in turn, causes limiting beliefs to become self-fulfilling prophecies.


To understand how this happens, imagine a person with the limiting belief that they don't deserve to have nice things. If this person should happen to receive a gift of something nice, perhaps a lovely piece of furniture, their limiting belief may activate to make itself true in spite of the evidence.

The person, for instance, may not take good care of the item, without consciously understanding why they're neglecting or abusing it. Due to this neglect or abuse, the item may become damaged or prematurely worn out. When the item is no longer in good condition, the person might correctly blame themselves for its deterioration, thus reinforcing the belief that they don't deserve to have nice things.

It's important to understand that we are very rarely aware of our limiting beliefs. The person in our example probably has no idea that their belief is driving their behavior, and may instead feel that they didn't have time to care for the item or that they are simply too lazy. Limiting beliefs operate most effectively when they exist well below our consciousness, informing our actions without informing us that they exist.

In this way they truly become the invisible obstacle to our success.

Indeed, limiting beliefs can play a major unseen role in sales.



In this paper, we'll examine three primary types of limiting beliefs, and 13 specific beliefs that impact sales. Then we'll show you how to combat limiting beliefs on your sales teams.



# THE 3 TYPES OF LIMITING BELIEFS

Limiting beliefs can be categorized according to whether the belief is about the self, others, or the world.

## LIMITING BELIEFS ABOUT THE SELF

Limiting beliefs about the self include ideas such as “I don’t deserve love,” “I’m no good at sports,” and “I always mess everything up.” These beliefs can, for example, cause you to behave in unlovable ways, avoid exercise, and to sabotage your success.

## LIMITING BELIEFS ABOUT OTHERS

Limiting beliefs about others include ideas such as “People don’t like me,” “People can’t be trusted,” and “People are always out to get me.” These beliefs can, for example, cause you to avoid people, behave in untrustworthy ways, and to act in a suspicious manner.

## LIMITING BELIEFS ABOUT THE WORLD

Limiting beliefs about the world include ideas such as “Hard work never pays off,” “The world is a dangerous and scary place,” and “People are either lucky or unlucky.” These beliefs can cause you to avoid work, avoid taking risks, and to fail to learn from mistakes due to the assumption that bad outcomes are just “bad luck.”



# 13 LIMITING BELIEFS THAT AFFECT SALES

Any limiting belief can impact sales, even one that seems unrelated. For instance, a core belief about your lovability can impact whether you use warmth and compassion to interact with prospects.

But some limiting beliefs are particularly common in the sales profession, and have an outsized impact on results.

Here are 13 of them.

## BELIEFS ABOUT SELF

- 1. I wasn’t born to be a salesperson**  
This belief can limit the salesperson’s commitment to the job as well as their ability to learn new skills, as they don’t believe it’s worthwhile.
- 2. I’m not experienced/smart/believable enough to talk to executives**  
This belief will limit the salesperson’s willingness and ability to get to critical decision makers and have business level discussions with them
- 3. I’m unlucky**  
This belief reduces the salesperson’s willingness to learn from mistakes, because when things go wrong, they will automatically assume that is simply “bad luck”.



#### 4. **I'm lazy**

This belief goes along with the organizational belief that salespeople ought to be self-disciplined, and it can limit the salesperson's ability to put supportive practices in place to counteract lack of discipline.

### **BELIEFS ABOUT OTHERS**

#### 5. **People are easily annoyed by questions**

This belief can cause a salesperson to avoid asking probing questions and going deep with discovery.

#### 6. **People don't trust me**

When salespeople believe that others don't trust them, they will tend to be defensive rather than proactive, and may also avoid asking probing questions.

#### 7. **Nobody likes salespeople**

This belief may cause the salesperson to behave in defensive and self-protective ways, and to avoid taking actions that might lead to rejection.

#### 8. **Decision makers especially don't like salespeople**

This limiting belief pushes salespeople to avoid one of the most important behaviors they can engage in, which is getting directly in touch with decision makers.

#### 9. **Buyers are logical**

This limiting belief causes salespeople to choose ineffective methods of persuasion, relying too heavily on facts and figures and features, while ignoring the human aspects of selling.

### **BELIEFS ABOUT THE WORLD**

#### 10. **Success is only for the lucky**

This belief limits a salesperson's ability to learn from success and failure, and to give up too easily after losses.

#### 11. **Hard work is for losers**

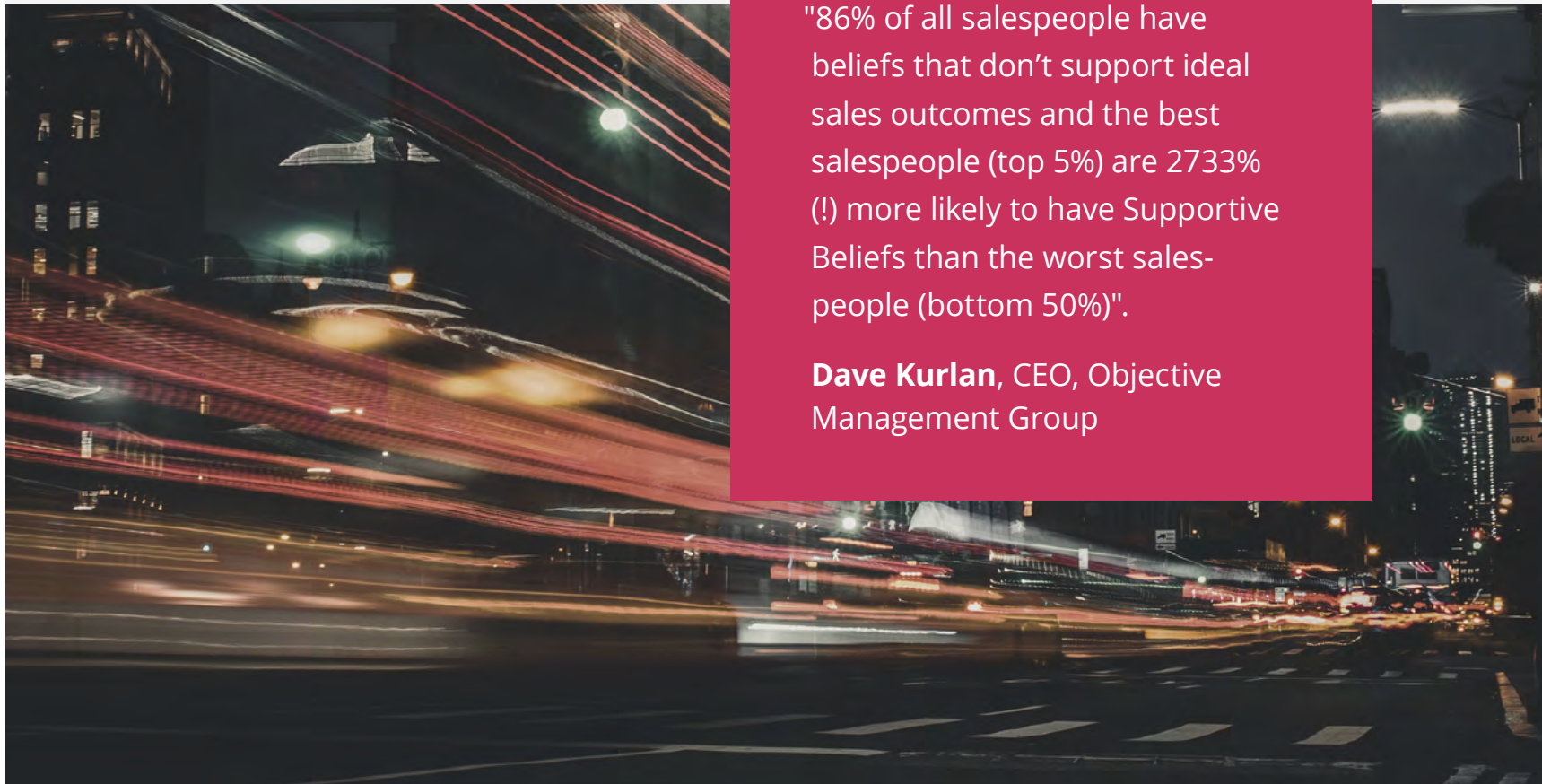
This belief can cause salespeople to give up easily, skip important steps, and choose leisure over the activities that would lead to their success.

#### 12. **It takes a long time for people to buy things**

In complex b2b sales, it's true that sales cycles can be long. But this belief can cause salespeople to accept a slower pace than is necessary, leading to lost sales and longer cycles.

#### 13. **It's not okay to talk about money**

This very common belief causes salespeople to avoid discussing budgets and helping buyers find the money to invest.



"86% of all salespeople have beliefs that don't support ideal sales outcomes and the best salespeople (top 5%) are 2733% (!) more likely to have Supportive Beliefs than the worst salespeople (bottom 50%)".

**Dave Kurlan**, CEO, Objective Management Group



# HOW TO CHANGE LIMITING BELIEFS INTO SUPPORTIVE BELIEFS

Limiting beliefs can kill deals and reduce sales team effectiveness. Any time your team is underperforming without obvious cause, you should suspect limiting beliefs as part of the problem.

The good news is that limiting beliefs can be converted into supportive beliefs, and doing so is a worthwhile investment. Once limiting beliefs are cleared and replaced with supportive beliefs, everything else gets easier and sales results improve.

Here's how to do it.

## 01. HELP SALESPEOPLE IDENTIFY AND ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR LIMITING BELIEFS

Limiting beliefs live and thrive in our unconscious minds. They're a little like a vampire in this regard: They suck the life right out of you, but only as long as the light of awareness never touches them.

Thus, the first step in combating a limiting belief is to bring it into the light and name it.

How to identify the presence of a limiting belief: When a salesperson consistently fails to improve some aspect of performance, even after being given the tools to do so, there's a good chance that a limiting belief is the culprit.

During coaching, explain to the salesperson what a limiting belief is and how it can impact behavior. Then ask them probing questions to identify what experiences they may have had in childhood or at other points in their life that might have created a limiting belief that could impact the behavior you've identified.

For instance, perhaps, despite training, a salesperson continues to avoid getting through to a decision maker, instead settling for conversations with gatekeepers. This may be grounded in a limiting belief about the self, others, or the world.

Identify which beliefs might be at play. For instance, might it be that the salesperson believes that decision makers don't like to talk to salespeople? Or perhaps they believe that they themselves don't have a right to speak to decision makers.

Ask the salesperson to come up with their own suggestions for limiting beliefs that might lead to this outcome. Then ask them to think deeply about which of those beliefs they may hold. It can be helpful for the salesperson to examine their childhood and think of who and what experiences might have taught them this belief.

Once a limiting belief has been identified, ask your salespeople to acknowledge that it exists and may be impacting their behavior, they'll be ready to begin overcoming them.



## 02. HELP THEM UNDERSTAND THAT THEIR LIMITING BELIEFS ARE NOT TRUE

Some beliefs that limit behaviors are actually true. For instance, you probably believe that you cannot fly from tall buildings without assistance. This limits your willingness to try. In this case, although it limits what you are willing to do, it is not a limiting belief, because it protects you from a negative outcome. Therefore, even though it “limits” what you will try, it does not limit your achievement.

On the other hand, the belief that people will never be able to fly was indeed a limiting belief for humanity until the aircraft was invented. Likewise, people used to believe that it was impossible for a human to run a mile in a minute—until someone decided not to believe it anymore, and achieved it.

Likewise, there may be beliefs that limit your salespeople’s willingness to try something, that are true beliefs. For instance, it is probably true that a buyer with a \$1 million budget will not purchase a \$30 million product. This (probably) true belief may prevent your salespeople from touting your \$30 million product to a \$1 million customer.

But there are also beliefs that limit your salespeople’s performance that are not true, even if they seem true. Just like the one-minute-mile was achievable once someone believed it was achievable, most of your salespeople’s reasonable goals are achievable once their limiting beliefs are removed and replaced with supportive beliefs.


To help your salespeople understand that their limiting beliefs are not true beliefs, help them uncover evidence of more supportive beliefs. For instance, if their belief is that they are not experienced enough to reach decision makers, demonstrate that other salespeople with less experience are in fact reaching decision makers. This evidence can help them accept that their limiting belief is not true.

## 03. HELP THE SALESPERSON CLOSE ANY SKILLS GAPS THAT ARE AFFECTING THE LIMITING BELIEF

In some cases, a limiting belief is supported by evidence because a salesperson lacks the correct skills to make the limiting belief untrue. For instance, a salesperson who lacks business acumen may be correct in believing that decision makers don’t trust them.

This is a limiting belief, indeed, but it is also one supported by facts. In cases like this, help your salespeople close their skills gaps and access the training and practice they need to make the limiting belief not true.

In these cases, however, it is not likely to be enough to close the skills gap. Even with the right skills, if the limiting belief continues to exist, the salesperson’s subconscious mind may continue to sabotage them. You still need to move on to step four.



"If you can change the limiting beliefs holding your people back, you can become the best sales organization in your market."

**George Brontén, CEO,**  
Membrain.com



## 04. CREATE NEW BELIEFS AND PRACTICE THEM

Nature hates a vacuum. In the case of limiting beliefs, even once you acknowledge and defeat the limiting belief, your job is not done. When limiting beliefs are not replaced with something else, they are almost guaranteed to creep back into our subconscious.

To avoid this, help your salespeople craft new, supportive belief statements to counter each limiting belief they hold. For instance, if the limiting belief is “nobody likes salespeople,” the new belief statement may be, “people like salespeople who can help them solve problems.”

Note: The new supportive belief must be believable to the salesperson. If it is too far-fetched, the subconscious will vehemently reject it. For instance, the statement, “everyone loves salespeople all the time!” would make anyone guffaw, and certainly would not help a salesperson replace their limiting belief that decision makers don’t like salespeople.

By qualifying the statement “people like salespeople” with “who can help them solve problems,” the salesperson can make the statement more acceptable to the unconscious mind.

Once the new belief statement has been crafted, have the salesperson post it somewhere visible and refer to it daily. Repeating it in writing or out loud helps to cement it in the mind.

This activity may feel silly at first, but it’s critical to overcoming the limiting belief.



## 05. TEACH THEM TO CHALLENGE SUBCONSCIOUS OBJECTIONS

As soon as you and your salespeople start using new belief statements, you will notice an interesting phenomenon: Your mind will throw up lots of objections. This is because limiting beliefs really hate to die, and they will fight for survival.

For instance, imagine that a salesperson’s new belief statement is that “people like salespeople who can help them solve problems.” While the salesperson is repeating this statement to themselves, they find themselves thinking, “But I don’t help people! I just sell them stuff!”

This is simply the limiting belief defending its territory.

To win this battle, you have to teach salespeople to overcome these objections as they arise.

To do so, the first key is to simply notice when it happens, and to write down the objection. They should then treat this objection as a new limiting belief and walk through steps 2 through 4 with the new one. They will end up with a new belief statement that counters the objection.

In our example, for instance, they may arrive at the belief statement, “I care about solving problems and I am learning to do it better and better every day.”

The new statement should now become part of their daily practice. Each time a new objection arises, the salesperson should follow this process again. Over time, this process will eliminate the old, unsupportive beliefs, and replace them with better ones that enable them to accomplish what they want to accomplish.



## 06. CONSIDER BRINGING IN PROFESSIONALS

If limiting beliefs are substantially impacting your team's performance, or blocking a promising salesperson in a meaningful way, consider hiring a sales coach or consultant with experience in limiting beliefs. They can help you root out what's interfering in performance, and may use a variety of professional modalities including hypnosis, affirmations, and cognitive behavioral therapy to help salespeople fast track to better, more supportive beliefs..

## CONCLUSION

Many of the limits our salespeople experience in their performance can be traced to subconscious beliefs, patterns, and responses that are not supportive of our success. By making the subconscious conscious, we support our team members in becoming better salespeople. And by supporting them in becoming better salespeople, we support our organization in meeting its goals.





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