

Conversational Belief Change Patterns



By Jamie Smart

Conversational Belief Change
By Jamie Smart

Contents

Conversational Belief-Change Patterns™	5
Some Tips for Conversational Belief-change	6
The Structure of Beliefs.....	7
[Examine the belief from a wider or narrower perspective]	8
[Examine the belief from a larger or smaller time-frame]	9
[Examine the belief using a larger or smaller number]	10
[Apply some aspect of the belief to the belief itself].....	11
[Apply some aspect of the belief to the current situation / interaction].....	12
What would happen if you did / could _____?	13
What stops you?	14
How do you know _____, as you sit here right now?	15
How would you know if that wasn't true?	16
['Chunk down' to a lower level, component or subcategory]	17
[Action] who / which / what _____ specifically?	18
[Action] how specifically?	19
['Chunk up' the belief (or an element of the belief) to a larger category / system]	20
What purpose has this belief been serving until now?	21
I know you want _____, but/and _____.....	22
Isn't it more important to _____ than to _____?.....	23
The issue isn't _____ or _____. The issue is _____.	24
Maybe it's not that _____; maybe it's that _____.	25
[Change a disempowering word to something more useful]	26
Believing this means _____, which will [could, can, may etc] _____.....	27
Have you ever [counter-example]?.....	28
That may be true in your model of the world, but _____.	29
Perhaps you developed that belief because _____.	30
Maybe you're just saying that because _____.	31
[Use a metaphor / analogy / story]	32

Conversational Belief Change

By Jamie Smart

Isn't that a bit like saying _____ [metaphor / analogy]?	33
What happens when you imagine _____?	34
So what I think you're highlighting is "How _____?"	35
How have you been perceiving this as _____ until now?	36
_____ haven't you _____ [aren't you / isn't it / etc].....	37
How can you [I/we/they/it] _____?	38
Yet... ..	39
So _____, but _____.....	40
As [pacing statement], I'm wondering... [I'm curious, I'm considering]	41
How does _____ mean _____?	42
How does _____ cause _____?	43
How _____, on a scale of 1-10?	44
[Accept the person you're working with exactly as they are].....	45
[Use their exact keywords, phrases and characteristic gestures]	46
When / where / in what situation or context could _____ have value?	47
What else could _____ mean?	48
What would you like to believe?	49
What must be true of them for them to believe that?	50
Why is it like that?	51
Who says? According to whom?	52
How is this a problem?	53
What is it that you want?	54
_____ for what purpose?	55
How have they been organising their perceptions to prove this belief to be true?	56
Yes, I understand that... [presuppose that the belief is not universal]	57
Yes, I know that you can feel... [redefine identity labels as skills, feelings or behaviours]	58

Conversational Belief Change

By Jamie Smart

Of course, I realise that sometimes you can... [presuppose they are in the active position] 59

If you had to teach me how to believe _____, how would you get me to do it? . 60

Conversational Belief-Change Patterns™

Sleight of Mouth is a powerful set of NLP language tools for conversational belief-change. Robert Dilts coined the name after witnessing Richard Bandler using patterns he co-developed with Dr. Christina Hall PhD. Dilts proceeded to model Bandler and make explicit the patterns he was using, then augmented them with the patterns of famous rhetoricians through history. The resulting patterns are presented in these cards, alongside other patterns useful for shifting beliefs conversationally.

- Eliminate limiting beliefs for yourself & others
- Create powerful, positive belief-sets
- Learn 'Sleight of Mouth' quickly & easily
- Master conversational belief-change
- Turbo-charge your coaching & influence skills
- Achieve your goals & bring your dreams to life
- Contains 52 language patterns & 52 Belief change Questions (BCQs)

Some Tips for Conversational Belief-change

- Rapport is absolutely essential!
- Assume the person can actually do (on some level) what they say they can't.
- Assume and uncover the positive intention / purpose of the belief.
- Acknowledge the reality of the situation.
- Determine the belief's structure.
- The belief will be represented in the body in some way. Belief-change will involve state-change.
- Remember that beliefs are self-protective and survival oriented.
- Presuppose that beliefs are perceptions.
- Wire in the language patterns on these cards and enjoy experimenting with them.
- Know your outcome, and be present, aware and intuitive. Language patterns are not a substitute for a sense of direction, open sensory channels, and behavioural flexibility.

The Structure of Beliefs

You can model beliefs as 'feed-forward' mechanisms that sort & filter data in order to prove themselves to be true. Beliefs are valuable resources, generalisations that people use to give themselves a sense of certainty & a basis for decision-making in an uncertain & ambiguous world. Beliefs have sensory & linguistic representations – when one changes, the other will change. The linguistic structure of a belief can be described as either A causes B or A means B. People are often only aware of part of a belief (the A or the B), but you can use questions like Why is it like that? & How do you know? to uncover the linguistic structure of the belief (the A & the B). Uncovering the linguistic structure & acknowledging the value / positive intention of the belief makes belief-change faster & more effective.

[Examine the belief from a wider or narrower perspective]

When you increase the 'frame size' of a limiting belief, a person starts to include information that they'd previously excluded. You can change the frame size in terms of perspective, space, time, number or anything else you can think of. "If I don't control people then things won't turn out right." *I understand how you feel, but you don't have to control the culture of Eastern Europe, do you?* "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *Maybe it's a matter of starting with one language pattern, and getting comfortable with that before you continue mastering the others.* **BCQ: How can you introduce a larger or smaller perspective that could alter how the person perceives this belief?** (Sleight of Mouth Pattern: Change Frame Size)

[Examine the belief from a wider or narrower perspective]

[Examine the belief from a larger or smaller time-frame]

You can change frame size in terms of time. "If I don't control people then things won't turn out right." *You weren't born believing this, were you?* Or take it in the other direction. *How will your great-great-grandchildren manage when you're not here to control them?* "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *When you were a child, you didn't use language at all, yet now you can speak fluently, can't you?* **BCQ: How can you use a larger or smaller time-frame to alter how the person perceives this belief?** (Sleight of Mouth Pattern: Change Frame Size)

[Examine the belief from a larger or smaller time-frame]

[Examine the belief using a larger or smaller number]

You can change frame size in terms of the number of occurrences. "If I don't control people then things won't turn out right." *I understand how you feel, and I guess you don't have to control every single person in the country, do you?* "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *What are some of the common words and phrases that you use regularly on a day-to-day basis? Let's start by exploring the patterns of language you are already using comfortably.*

BCQ: How can you use a larger or smaller number of occurrences to alter how the person perceives this belief? (Sleight of Mouth Pattern: Change Frame Size)

[Examine the belief using a larger or smaller number]

[Apply some aspect of the belief to the belief itself]

In Aikido, you turn an opponent's own energy against them. You can do something similar with limiting beliefs, by using an aspect of the belief 'against' the belief itself. "If I don't control people then things won't turn out right." *How well are you controlling that belief? How is that belief turning out for you?* "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *Did you realise that when you used the word 'because' just now, you were using an NLP language pattern?* You can use the other 'side' of the belief too. *How comfortable do you feel having this belief?* You can even be provocative, as long as you have deep rapport and a warm sense of connection. *Oh my God! How did you manage to say that?* **BCQ: What elements of this belief could you usefully apply to the belief itself?** (Sleight of Mouth Pattern: Apply to Self)

[Apply some aspect of the belief to the belief itself]

[Apply some aspect of the belief to the current situation / interaction]

You can apply an aspect of a belief to the person who holds it, or to the current situation, (sometimes suggesting an unsuspected consequence of the belief). "If I don't control people then things won't turn out right."
How are you managing to control this conversation? It seems as though that belief may have been controlling you until now. "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *How comfortable do you feel using the pattern of language you just stated that belief with?* **BCQ: What's the effect of applying elements of this belief to the current situation?** (Sleight of Mouth Pattern: Apply to Self)

[Apply some aspect of the belief to the current situation / interaction]

What would happen if you did / could _____?

The words "I can't" can signal the presence of a limiting belief. In many cases, the person hasn't even imagined doing the thing they've been saying they can't do. This question takes them outside their existing model of reality. "I can't speak in public. I don't have self-confidence." *What would happen if you did speak in public? What would happen if you did have self-confidence?* "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *What would happen if you did use them?* **BCQ: What happens when they imagine doing what they say they can't?** (Sleight of Mouth Pattern: Reality Strategy)

What would happen if you did / could?

What stops you?

When someone says "I can't", there may be something outside of consciousness that's been holding them back. When you ask "*What stops you?*" they access that internal representation! Watch carefully and you'll be able to spot the eye movements, gestures and other non-verbal clues. For example: "I can't speak in public." *What stops you?* Eyes flick up, head jerks back, then they gesture with left hand as they say "When I imagine it, something tells me people will be bored." By the time they start talking, they've already accessed the internal representation(s) that they've perceived as stopping them. ***BCQ: How are they stopping themselves internally? What internal representations are they using to do this?*** (Sleight of Mouth Pattern: Reality Strategy)

What stops you?

How do you know _____, as you sit here right now?

This is a great question for starting to shift a limiting belief. "I can't speak in public. I don't have self-confidence." *How do you know you can't speak in public, as you sit here right now?* "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *How do you know this is true, as you sit here right now?* When you ask the question, the person runs through the internal process they use to make the belief seem 'true'. Watch and listen to pick up clues about how they're doing it (e.g. eye movements, gestures, sensory language etc.) Sometimes they'll tell you a story, starting with "because...", which can be useful information in its own right. **BCQ: What internal process do they run to validate this belief?** (Sleight of Mouth Pattern: Reality Strategy)

How do you know _____, as you sit here right now?

How would you know if that wasn't true?

Beliefs aren't really 'true' - they're just ideas. This question is a great way of gently challenging limiting beliefs. Why? Because the person has to start imagining a new belief in order to answer the question. "If I don't control people then things won't turn out right." *How would you know if that wasn't true?* "I can't speak in public. I don't have self-confidence." *How would you know if that wasn't true?* "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *How would you know if that weren't true?* "I'd feel excited about experimenting with them." *And where would you feel that excitement, now...?* **BCQ: What happens when they imagine doubting this belief?** (Sleight of Mouth Pattern: Reality Strategy)

How would you know if that wasn't true?

['Chunk down' to a lower level, component or subcategory]

You can 'chunk down' a limiting belief, drilling down to a lower level or subcategory. "If I don't control people then things won't turn out right." *Hmmm... but I don't suppose you have to control their heart rate and blink reflex, do you?* "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *Which words do you feel least comfortable with? And which words do you feel most comfortable with?* **BCQ: What is a lower level, subcategory or component implied by the belief statement that could lead to greater resourcefulness and new perspectives?** (Sleight of Mouth Pattern: Chunk Down)

['Chunk down' to a lower level, component or subcategory]

[Action] who / which / what _____ specifically?

One way you can 'chunk down' a belief statement is by asking for specifics about who, which and what. In order to answer your question, the person has to bring more sensory-based information into their awareness. This can lead them to re-examine the generalisation stated in the belief. "If I don't control people then things won't turn out right." *Control who specifically?* "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *Can't use which language patterns specifically? Where in your body would you feel the comfort that you haven't been feeling until now?* **BCQ: What elements of the belief could you usefully gather more information about?** (Sleight of Mouth Pattern: Chunk Down)

[Action] who / which / what _____ specifically?

[Action] how specifically?

You can 'chunk down' a belief statement by asking for specifics about the actions stated in the belief. In order to answer your question, the person has to bring more information into their awareness (and your awareness, giving you a better idea of how they're experiencing reality). This can lead them to re-examine the generalisation stated in the belief. "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *Can't use them how specifically? Don't feel comfortable how specifically?* "If I don't control people then things won't turn out right." *Control how specifically? Won't turn out right how specifically?* **BCQ: What actions in the belief are stated vaguely?** (Sleight of Mouth Pattern: Chunk Down)

[Action] how specifically?

['Chunk up' the belief (or an element of the belief) to a larger category / system]

The human mind loves categorising things. When you examine the broader categories or 'systems' that contain the belief (or its elements), you can discover new resources and perspectives. "I can't use NLP Language patterns (*an example of a new skill-set*) because I don't feel comfortable with them (*an example of a signal*)."
"During the process of mastery, we each have signals that let us know we've reached the very edge of our existing skill-set, the exciting place where genuinely new learning can begin." **BCQ: What is the belief statement (or its elements) an example or component of? What's a higher level that could offer greater resourcefulness?** (Sleight of Mouth Pattern: Chunk Up)

['Chunk up' the belief (or an element of the belief) to a larger category / system]

What purpose has this belief been serving until now?

Every belief has a positive intention – it was developed for some purpose. It is a resource, and there are contexts where it could be useful. When you acknowledge its purpose and value, you let the belief know that you are “on its side”. If you try to change a belief without acknowledging the belief’s intention, you may trigger defensiveness, which just embeds the belief more deeply. “If I don’t control people then things won’t turn out right.” *What purpose has this belief been serving until now?* It keeps the people I love from getting hurt. “I can’t use NLP language patterns because I don’t feel comfortable with them.” *What purpose has this belief been serving until now?* “It’s been stopping me from making mistakes.”

BCQ: What are some of the possible purposes for someone having developed this belief? (Sleight of Mouth Pattern: Intention)

What purpose has this belief been serving until now?

I know you want _____, but/and _____.

One of the presuppositions of NLP is that every behaviour has a positive intention. You can extend this idea to beliefs, and use it to make changes. "If I don't control people then things won't turn out right." *I know you want the best for the people you love, but this belief could end up alienating them.* You can take a guess at what you think the intention might be, or use information the person has offered you. "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *I know you want to become highly skilled with language, and allowing yourself to experiment and learn from your mistakes is an essential part of that learning process.* **BCQ: What is the positive intention of this belief? What purpose is it serving?** (Sleight of Mouth Pattern: Intention)

I know you want _____, but/and _____.

Isn't it more important to _____ than to _____?

Everyone has criteria, the things that are important to them in a given situation. If you can get them to evaluate the criteria of a limiting belief against something which is more important to them, the belief can change. "If I don't control people then things won't turn out right." *Isn't it more important to have satisfying relationships than to be in control? Isn't it more important to enjoy the process than to fixate on the result?* "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *Isn't it more important to enjoy learning and experimenting with these patterns than to feel entirely comfortable with them right away?*

BCQ: What's something important to this person that could be affected by this belief? (Sleight of Mouth Pattern: Hierarchy of Criteria)

Isn't it more important to _____ than to _____?

Conversational Belief Change
By Jamie Smart

The issue isn't _____ or _____. The issue is _____.

One of the ways you can change someone's belief frame is to direct their attention to an outcome they weren't even considering. "If I don't control people then things won't turn out right." *The issue isn't who you control or how things turn out, but how you can learn to trust your unconscious.* "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *The issue isn't your ability to use these patterns, or how comfortable you feel. The issue is how quickly you can expand your awareness to notice where you're already using these patterns, & just hadn't realised it until now.* **BCQ: What's a possible outcome of (or purpose for) holding this belief that the person may not be aware of?** (Sleight of Mouth Pattern: Another Outcome)

The issue isn't _____ or _____. The issue is _____.

Maybe it's not that _____; maybe it's that _____.

The linguistic structure of a belief can be described as either "[CAUSE] causes [EFFECT]" or "[CAUSE] means [EFFECT]". When you redefine the meaning of the cause or the effect, it can change the meaning of the belief. And when the meaning changes, the belief can change. "If I don't control people then things won't turn out right." *Maybe it's not that they won't turn out right. Maybe it's that they won't turn out the way you want them to.* "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *Maybe it's not that you're uncomfortable with language patterns; maybe it's that you're moving temporarily out of your comfort zone as you learn them. Maybe it's not that you can't use these language patterns; maybe it's that you aren't as fluent with them as you want to be, yet...* **BCQ: How can you define a word or phrase from the belief in a more useful, empowering way?** (Sleight of Mouth Pattern: Redefine)

Maybe it's not that _____; maybe it's that _____.

[Change a disempowering word to something more useful]

Using extreme language (nightmare, emergency, disaster etc) to describe less-than-extreme situations (train delay, lost keys, missed project deadlines) has a very specific effect: it freaks people out. When a person gets freaked out, adrenalin gets pumped into their system, a signal that they are in a struggle for survival. But you can 'tone down' the language to elicit a more appropriate response. "We're running late – this is an absolute nightmare!" *I'll call ahead to let them know we've had a bit of a hiccup and we'll be a few minutes late.* It's important that your new definition still acknowledges the reality of the situation. "The website's gone down. It's a total disaster." *No, Chernobyl was a disaster. This is a minor inconvenience. How quickly can we get it back up again?* **BCQ:** ***What word(s) could describe this situation more helpfully?*** (Sleight of Mouth Pattern: Redefine)

[Change a disempowering word to something more useful]

Believing this means _____, which will [could, can, may etc] _____.

People aren't necessarily aware of the consequences of their beliefs; bringing them into awareness can help create the conditions for change. "I can't speak in public. I don't have self-confidence." *Believing this means you have a desire to express yourself, which will really help you stay motivated as you continue developing the resources you need to enjoy speaking in public.* "If I don't control people then things won't turn out right." *Believing this means people often get resentful, which could make things go badly wrong.* "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *Believing this means you realise how important it is to be congruent in what you say, which can be your signal that you've successfully integrated a given pattern.* **BCQ: What could be a possible effect of holding this belief?** (Sleight of Mouth Pattern: Consequence)

Believing this means _____, which will [could, can, may etc] _____.

Have you ever [counter-example]?

People tend to filter out evidence that doesn't match their beliefs. But if they become aware of an exception (called a *counter-example*), the belief can shift dramatically. You can ask them to look for the counterexample. "If I don't control people then things won't turn out right." *Have you ever controlled things & they've turned out wrong?* "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *Have you ever done anything even though you were feeling a bit uncomfortable?* You can even think of one yourself and suggest it (the more extreme the better!) *Are you saying you can't do anything unless you feel entirely comfortable? Not even use the toilet when you've really got to go?* **BCQ: What are some possible exceptions to this belief?** (Sleight of Mouth Pattern: Counterexample)

Have you ever [counter-example]?

That may be true in your model of the world, but _____.

The map is not the territory; different individuals and groups have different models of the world. You can acknowledge a person's model of the world, while letting them know that there are other ways of looking at it. "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *That may be true in your model of the world, but behavioural psychologists agree that moving out of your comfort zone can be an important part of the learning process.* "If I don't control people then things won't turn out right." *That may be true in your model of the world, but people working in the field of addictions have found that excessive attempts to control can result in greater chaos. That may be true in your model of the world, but racing driver Mario Andretti says "If you feel like you're in control, you're not going fast enough."* **BCQ: What's a model of the world that could offer you a different way of perceiving this belief?** (Sleight of Mouth Pattern: Model of the World)

That may be true in your model of the world, but _____.

Perhaps you developed that belief because _____.

It's possible to help someone create a new belief about their limiting belief, giving the belief new meaning. As ever, rapport is absolutely essential when doing this! "If I don't control people then things won't turn out right." *Perhaps you developed that belief because you grew up in an environment where things were chaotic & out of control. Perhaps you developed that belief because you were attracted by the sense of certainty that control could give you. "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." Perhaps you developed that belief because by the time you realised there was such a thing as language patterns, you already knew how to speak fluently. **BCQ: What is something you could believe about this belief that would result in a more useful perspective?*** (Sleight of Mouth Pattern: Meta Frame)

Perhaps you developed that belief because _____.

Maybe you're just saying that because ____.

This is for creating a new belief about the limiting belief. Rapport is more important than ever when using this pattern. "If I don't control people then things won't turn out right." *Maybe you're just saying that because you had to take on so much responsibility from such an early age. Maybe you're just saying that because you don't want me to get the credit for this session going well!* "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *Maybe you're just saying that because you haven't given yourself permission to explore and experiment until now.* Handle with care! **BCQ: What are some of the more empowering possible reasons for the person having this belief?** (Sleight of Mouth Pattern: Meta Frame)

Maybe you're just saying that because ____.

[Use a metaphor / analogy / story]

A well-chosen metaphor can offer a different meaning for one or more aspects of the belief. "If I don't control people then things won't turn out right." *I was learning how to juggle, and with juggling you start by throwing one ball in the air, then two balls with one hand. But when it comes time to add the third ball, you don't have enough hands to control them all. You just have to relax and let go.* "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *It's a bit like learning to ride a bicycle. At first it seems unnatural, because it's so new. But then one day, once you've passed through that uncomfortable initial stage, you suddenly feel a sense of exhilaration when you realise you've got the freedom to go in whatever direction you like.* **BCQ: What is this an example of, and what are some other examples of that?** (Sleight of Mouth Pattern: Metaphor / Analogy)

[Use a metaphor / analogy / story]

Isn't that a bit like saying _____ [metaphor / analogy]?

Sometimes, giving an example of something that has a similar structure or implication to the belief can provide powerful new perspectives. "If I don't control people then things won't turn out right." *Isn't that a bit like saying there's only one possible way for things to turn out? Isn't that a bit like saying that you could never enjoy someone giving you a surprise?* "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *Isn't that a bit like saying you can't learn to ride a bicycle because you haven't got your balance yet?* **BCQ: What is this similar to? What is an example of something that has a similar structure to this belief?** (Sleight of Mouth Pattern: Metaphor / Analogy)

Isn't that a bit like saying _____ [metaphor / analogy]?

What happens when you imagine _____?

People don't do things until they first imagine them, which they'll need to do in order to answer this question! "If I don't control people then things won't turn out right." *What happens when you imagine letting people develop responsibility for themselves?* "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *What happens when you imagine feeling comfortable using these patterns?* While this won't necessarily create a huge shift, they will respond with additional information, both verbally and non-verbally, so watch and listen! **BCQ: What can I usefully get them to imagine?**

What happens when you imagine _____?

So what I think you're highlighting is "How _____?"

Criticisms are often over-generalised negative statements. By finding (or mindreading) the positive intention behind the criticism, and shifting from a problem focus to an outcome focus, you can generate a useful how question. "This stuff never works in real life." *So what I think you're highlighting is "How can we apply this in a way that delivers real lasting benefits?"* You may need to do some digging to uncover the positive intention before saying this. "These patterns are too complicated." *So what I think you're highlighting is "How can you learn these patterns in a clearly structured way, where you know which patterns to use in which situations?"* **BCQ: What is the positive intention behind this criticism? What "how" question can I use to connect that intention to the desired outcome?**

So what I think you're highlighting is "How _____?"

How have you been perceiving this as _____ until now?

This is a great question for subtly reframing problems, issues & limiting beliefs. "If I don't control people then things won't turn out right." *How have you been perceiving this as a problem until now?* This question has several powerful effects: 1) it paces their experience. 2) it reframes their problem or limiting belief as their perception, not reality. 3) the combination of time language and "until now" presuppose the possibility that this is already changing. "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *How have you been perceiving this as having limited you until now?* **BCQ: What are some of the things you can presuppose in your questions and statements that will empower your listener?**

How have you been perceiving this as _____ until now?

_____ haven't you _____ [aren't you / isn't it / etc]

Tag questions can be used to join two phrases together in an ambiguous way that gets someone to re-evaluate what's been said in the first phrase (often by playing with their sense of time). "If I don't control people then things won't turn out right." *I can see how that belief has really been serving you... didn't it... help you reach the point, now, where you can relax and let things continue evolving in their own way?* "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *You want to be able to use language skilfully... can't you... already imagine how your skills and abilities will continue to increase?* This can sound a bit strange at first... didn't it... start you wondering how much fun you can have practicing these patterns? **BCQ: How can I use a tag question to shift their time perspective in relation to this belief?**

_____ haven't you... _____ (aren't you / isn't it etc)

How can you [I/we/they/it] _____?

One of the quickest ways of moving someone from a 'limitation space' to a 'possibility space' is by turning can't-statements into how-questions. "I can't speak in public. I don't have self-confidence." *How can you learn to enjoy speaking in public? How can you start increasing your confidence?* This is also a great one to use with yourself. "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *How can I learn to use some of the patterns today? How can I start to become more and more comfortable with them?* **BCQ: How can I turn this into a how-question?**

How can you [I/we/they/it] _____?

Conversational Belief Change

By Jamie Smart

Yet...

"Yet" can be a great word to add when someone states a limitation, because it shifts their unconscious focus to a more resourceful future. Use it as the first word of your sentence, then pause slightly, and they won't even be consciously aware of it! "I can't speak in public." Yet... *you can enjoy imagining what it would be like when you can.* "I can't use NLP language patterns." Yet, *you can start thinking about how you'll celebrate your successes as you grow more comfortable with them.* "I can't use this pattern with my clients!" Yet, *you can feel excited about just how much fun you will have with it once you can, aren't you?* **BCQ: How can I make what they've just said into the first part of a sentence that leads somewhere useful?**

Yet...

Conversational Belief Change

By Jamie Smart

So _____, but _____.

The word 'but' dismisses whatever precedes it in a sentence, and leaves the focus on what follows it. This is a fact people sometimes use to their disadvantage, but you can turn it to your advantage (and theirs) by flipping the order of the two ideas. "I'd like to be able to do public-speaking, but I don't have the confidence." *So you haven't developed all the confidence you want yet, but you'd really like to enjoy public speaking.* "I want to get good at NLP language patterns, but I don't feel comfortable with them." *So you don't feel entirely comfortable that you've achieved the level of skill you desire, but you feel excited about getting good at using NLP language patterns.* **BCQ: Which parts of what they are saying (and thinking) could be worth bringing more into the foreground?**

So _____, but _____.

As [pacing statement], I'm wondering... [I'm curious, I'm considering]

Limiting beliefs are self-protective - they want to 'survive'. For change to happen, they need to be approached with a sense of safety and respect. In a word, *rapport*. One of the ways you can avoid 'defense' responses is by softening your questions and statements. *As I listen to you, I'm wondering how you would know if that belief weren't true?* You can use comments about your shared experience as pacing statements. *As we sit here together now, I'm curious to know what you think the purpose for developing that belief might have been; how it's been trying to serve you?* If the person gets defensive, it means you've lost rapport. In that case, stop what you've been doing and re-establish rapport immediately.

As [pacing statement], I'm wondering... [I'm curious, I'm considering]

How does _____ mean _____?

There are two main ways that beliefs show up in language: 'A means B' or 'A causes B'. When a belief is expressed as 'A means B', the person has made those two ideas 'the same' in their mind, like saying 'A equals B'. But they're not the same. "My lack of self-confidence means I can't do public-speaking." *How does your level of self-confidence mean you can't do public speaking?* To answer the question, the person will have to re-examine how they made those two ideas mean the same thing in the first place. Watch and listen for the clues they give you, both verbally and non-verbally. By the way, sometimes people will leave out the word "means", and just present the two ideas side by side. "I can't speak in public. I don't have self-confidence." The word "means" is implied – you can still ask the question. *How does your not having self-confidence mean you can't speak in public?* You can even challenge the presupposition. *Who says you need self-confidence to speak in public?* **BCQ: How are they making these ideas mean the same thing?**

How does _____ mean _____?

How does _____ cause _____?

People like reasons for things; it gives us a sense of certainty. As a result, people will often use reasons (causes) to support their beliefs. In fact 'A causes B' is one of the main ways beliefs show up in language. When you ask how A causes B, the person has to re-examine the sequence of events that gets them from A to B. "If I don't control people then things won't turn out right." *How does not controlling people cause things not to turn out right?* "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *How does your not feeling comfortable cause you to not be able to use the patterns?* Of course, you can play with time, redefinition etc in conjunction with this pattern. *How has your comfort level been preventing you from experimenting with these patterns until now?* **BCQ: What's the sequence of perceptions they are using to link these two ideas? How are they managing to perceive A as causing B?**

How does _____ cause _____?

How _____, on a scale of 1-10?

A good way to uncover limiting beliefs is by asking people to rate their outcomes and goals. *How possible is this for you, on a scale of 1-10? How much do you feel you deserve this, on a scale of 1-10?* Of course, anything's possible, and people deserve to have whatever they want, but sometimes they don't feel it's possible, or that they deserve it. This can uncover limiting beliefs taking forms like "I don't deserve it because..." or "It's not possible for ME because..." Then you can use the other patterns to start reframing them. You can also use this for rating a limiting belief: *How true does this seem to you at the moment, on a scale of 1-10?* This gives you a reference that you can check back against as you help make changes. **BCQ: How strong or weak is this belief?**

How _____, on a scale of 1-10?

[Accept the person you're working with exactly as they are]

Human beings have what's called an "opposition response" that can get triggered if someone wants us to do something (especially if that 'something' is to change our beliefs.) A powerful way to bypass the opposition response is to accept the person you're working with exactly as they are. Say to yourself "*I accept this person exactly as they are*", then say "*thank-you*" to any thoughts and feelings that come up. One of the presuppositions of NLP is that the positive worth of the individual is held constant, while the value and appropriateness of internal and/or external behaviour is questioned. Acceptance communicates this congruently at the highest level, and helps to create deep rapport. Of course, it's easier to accept others when you accept yourself exactly as you are! ***BCQ: What are some of the ways I can practice accepting people exactly as they are?***

[Accept the person you're working with exactly as they are]

[Use their exact keywords, phrases and characteristic gestures]

The unconscious mind selects specific words, phrases and gestures to express meaning. Watch and listen to pick up the expressions that have particular significance to the person, then use these exact words, phrases and gestures back to them. Do it respectfully and elegantly, and you will deepen rapport. If you should happen to feel like you're starting to sound like a parrot, you can say something like "*Just to make sure I understand, what you want is...*" or "*Just to make sure we're on the same page...*" People use the words they do for a reason, and as long as you do this with a positive intention, they will appreciate you for using the words that are important to them. ***BCQ: What words, phrases and gestures are important and meaningful to this person?***

[Use their exact keywords, phrases and characteristic gestures]

When / where / in what situation or context could _____ have value?

There are basically two types of reframing: 'content' & 'context'. All the sleight-of-mouth patterns are based on these two basic types, so it's worth developing your skills with them. This is a classic 'context reframing' question. You can practice this easily whenever someone states a complaint about themselves, or someone else. "She's too talkative." *In what situation or context could 'being talkative' have value?* Perhaps at a party, helping people break the ice. Once a person is able to recognise that the behaviour is actually useful in some context, they can stop judging it as "bad" and start focusing on how to get the results they want in the current situation. "I'm too lazy." *In what situation or context could 'being lazy' have value?* Maybe in a relaxation class, where people need a model of how to relax & take it easy. **BCQ: What are some of the contexts you can imagine where this could have value?**

When / where / in what situation or context could _____ have value?

What else could _____ mean?

You can practice this classic content reframing question by asking it of yourself when a person has an unresourceful response to some situation. "I feel angry when he's late." *What else could this anger mean? What else could him being late mean? What else could this situation mean?* "I feel confused when I see all these language patterns." *What else could this 'feeling confused' mean?* "Perhaps that learning is taking place at an unconscious level." *What else could 'seeing all these language patterns' mean?* "That they recognise the need to work through them pattern by pattern, & allow their language skills to develop cumulatively." In any situation where you or someone else is feeling limited or less than resourceful in some way, you can ask yourself (or ask them) the question... **BCQ: What else could this mean?**

What else could _____ mean?

What would you like to believe?

Nature always fills a vacuum, so it can be useful to start lining up new, empowering beliefs to fill the space that's going to be left by the limiting belief(s) you're helping a person to change. Of course, the questions that are effective in uncovering limiting beliefs can be tuned to help build empowering ones. *What would you like to believe?* "That I can use NLP language patterns comfortably and effectively." *How will you know that's true?* *What will you, see, hear and feel that will let you know you believe it?* *What would have to be true for you to believe that?* *What happens when you imagine believing that?* *If you had to teach me to believe this, how would you do it?* *For what purpose believing this?* **BCQ: What could be some useful, empowering beliefs to start developing?**

What would you like to believe?

What must be true of them for them to believe that?

This is a question you ask *yourself* to uncover the presuppositions in someone else's model of reality. A presupposition is what must be accepted as true for the sentence to make sense. You can become aware of the presuppositions in language, then challenge the ones which don't seem useful. "If I don't control things and people they won't turn out right." *So there's only one right way for things to turn out?* "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *Are you saying you can't use anything you don't feel entirely comfortable with yet?* **BCQ: What must be true of them for them to say that? To do that? To have learned that? To believe that?**

What must be true of them for them to believe that?

Why is it like that?

Working with beliefs can be like archaeology – you sometimes need to uncover a certain amount to make progress. When someone expresses a belief-fragment, you can use this question to get more information about what's going on. "I can't use NLP language patterns." *Why is it like that?* "Because when I tried it, it didn't sound natural and I felt uncomfortable." This gives you both sides of the "Cause-Effect" structure of the belief. "How do you know?" and "How is this a problem for you?" are also useful for uncovering the linguistic (and non-linguistic) structure of a belief.

BCQ: How are they perceiving reality in such a way that this belief make sense to them? What's the story behind this belief?

Why is it like that?

Who says? According to whom?

Sometimes rules get handed down by other people, and then integrated into a person's belief set. Asking this question can get the person to backtrack to where the rule came from. "People can't be trusted." *Who says?* There is a big difference between a belief that has been handed down by others, and one that's been generalised from your own experience. Watch and listen when you ask the question so you can pick up non-verbal as well as verbal cues. "Winning isn't everything – it's the only thing." *According to whom?* (Eyes flick straight across to the left). "Me... I think?" *And how did you come to believe that?* "Ummm... playing football when I was 5. The teacher used to tell us." ***BCQ: Are they stating an "unwritten law" or rule that's been given to them by someone else?***

Who says? According to whom?

How is this a problem?

People perceive a belief as “limiting” when it blocks them from achieving an outcome or moving in a direction that’s important for them. Often, the person’s focus has shifted from what they want (their outcome) to the belief itself. It’s almost as though they’ve lost sight of what they want; like the belief is “standing between” them and their outcome. “I can’t speak in public. I don’t have self-confidence.” *How is this a problem?* “Because I want to get a promotion, but it will mean I have to do presentations from time to time.” This question starts to bring what’s important back into focus. “I can’t use NLP language patterns because I don’t feel comfortable with them.” *How is this a problem?* “Because I want to be a great coach so I can help people reach their potential. Being able to use language skilfully is a really important part of that.” ***BCQ: How is the person perceiving the belief as limiting them?***

How is this a problem?

What is it that you want?

When a person states a "limiting" belief, they are often omitting what they want. In effect, they are focusing on what they don't want (the limitation) rather than what they want (their outcome). It's worth bringing the goal back into focus. Questions for clarifying outcomes include: *What do you want (stated in the positive)? How will you know you've got it (sensory evidence)? Is it initiated and maintained by you? Where and when do you want it? Does it keep the positive aspects of the current situation? Is there anything you might lose as a result of getting this? How does this effect the wider systems you're part of? What will you do?* Sometimes, people will say they want whatever the opposite of their perceived limitation is. "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." So *what is it that you want?* "To feel comfortable with them." Counter-intuitively, this just feeds back into the pattern of limitation. Ask "*What will this get you?*" or "*For what purpose?*" to direct their focus to the broader outcome and direction. **BCQ: What goal is the "limiting belief" preventing the person from achieving?**

What is it that you want?

_____ for what purpose?

Sometimes, when you ask people what they want, they say whatever the opposite of their perceived limitation is. "I can't speak in public. I don't have self-confidence." *So what is it that you want?* "Confidence." While that makes sense on one level, it actually reinforces the pattern of limitation. Direct their attention to the larger outcome and purpose. *Speak in public for what purpose?* "So I can reach people, and wake them up to how amazing they are." "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *Use NLP language patterns for what purpose?* So I can help people make the changes they want to make.

BCQ: What is the larger purpose that the "limitation" has been preventing them from fulfilling until now?

_____ for what purpose?

How have they been organising their perceptions to prove this belief to be true?

This is a question to ask yourself when working with others. You can model beliefs as having two main functions: a *thinker* and a *prover*. When the *thinker* thinks something, the *prover* arranges all incoming information (using deletion, distortion and generalisation) to prove that belief to be true. If they think they're a slow learner, their prover will prove that to be true. If you think you're a fast learner, your prover will prove that to be true. Over time, the external reality of a person's life starts coming into line with what they've been believing. What the thinker thinks, the prover proves. ***BCQ: What has their thinker been thinking? How has their prover been proving it?***

How have they been organising their perceptions to prove this belief to be true?

Yes, I understand that... [presuppose that the belief is not universal]

When someone perceives a belief as limiting them, it often seems to them as though the belief is always true; an implied universal. "I can't speak in public. I don't have self-confidence." This person may "feel" as though this statement is true at all times and in all situations, but you can presuppose differently. *Yes, I understand that sometimes you can feel challenged by public speaking.* The "Yes, I understand" paces their belief while the "sometimes" subtly presupposes that this isn't always the case. *Yes, I understand that there have been situations where you've wanted to feel more confident, haven't you?* Saying "there have been situations" presupposes that there are other situations where this hasn't been the case. Meanwhile, "more confident" presupposes there was some there already, which subtly shifts the idea that they "don't have it." **BCQ: How can I presuppose that their belief is not universal?**

Yes, I understand that... [presuppose that the belief is not universal]

Yes, I know that you can feel... [redefine identity labels as skills, feelings or behaviours]

Limiting beliefs sometimes confuse identity with behaviour. Unhelpful identity labels like "I'm a slow learner" or "I'm shy" imply that these are fixed qualities, rather than a combination of ideas, feelings and behaviours. *Yes, I know that you can feel shy in certain situations.* This presupposes that shyness is a feeling they are capable of feeling, rather than something about who they are. *Yes, I know that sometimes you can feel that the rate that you've been learning hasn't been quite as fast as you might like, and I also know that learning is a cumulative process that takes place through time, so you might like to relax and allow your unconscious learning processes the time and space to integrate these learnings in a way that's effective for you.* **BCQ: How can I redefine their identity labels as skills, feelings or behaviours?** (Sleight of Mouth Pattern: Redefine)

Yes, I know that you can feel... [redefine identity labels as skills, feelings or behaviours]

**Of course, I realise that sometimes you can...
[presuppose they are in the active position]**

When someone perceives a belief as limiting them, they are implying that they're passive in relation to it – that the belief is the one in control. But you can use your language to put them back into the active position. "I can't use NLP language patterns because I don't feel comfortable with them." *Of course, I realise that sometimes you can feel uncomfortable when you use NLP language patterns...* Acknowledging that sometimes they "can feel uncomfortable" when they "use NLP language patterns" is something the person is likely to agree with. But in the process, they're unconsciously accepting that a) that they can use NLP language patterns, and b) that the uncomfortable feeling is actually an ability. Voila! They're back in the active position. **BCQ: How can I presuppose that they are in the active position?**

Of course, I realise that sometimes you can... [presuppose they are in the active position]

If you had to teach me how to believe _____, how would you get me to do it?

This question can be useful for getting more information about how the belief operates in their life, while subtly reframing them from “passive victim” to “active expert”. “I can’t speak in public. I don’t have self-confidence.” *If you had to teach me how to believe that, how would you get me to do it?* “I guess I’d get you to think about a time in the future when you have to do it, remember a time it went badly, feel bad and say to yourself that it’s going to go badly this time.” In order to ‘teach you’ how to ‘do’ the belief (which has been reframed as a skill), they need to perceive it from a new perceptual position, opening up new possibilities.

BCQ: How can I presuppose that their perceived limitation is in fact a skill?

If you had to teach me how to believe _____, how would you get me to do it?