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**Belief is a powerful force. In many instances, unstoppable.**

The eve before the 1995 World Cup Final, Morné du Plessis addressed the Bok squad with very few words. He said that he believed they would win the final – it was their destiny. In that moment, his words cemented their confidence and sense of calm. In retrospect, his words turned out to be prophetic. Maybe the All Black coach said a similar thing to his team that night and it inspired them also, yet they went home empty-handed. It shows that belief is not a guarantee of success, but without it very little has ever been achieved.

The role of “believing in people” has been well researched in various contexts. It is an undeniable, invisible motivator of employees chasing a sales target, dogs in dog school, children doing maths, soldiers at war and patients in hospital.

The social learning theories of leading researchers like Albert Bandura showed us that if you could persuade students that they have the ability to achieve a task, they would work harder from the outset with increasing confidence. In the realm of psychotherapy, a therapist’s belief in the ability of the patient to make progress is a key predictor in the success of the therapeutic process.

This is an almost magical reality: the extent to which you believe in someone else increases their ability to be successful. There is a profound psychological impact on another human being if you can say with confidence that you believe in them

and their competence.

Recently I worked with a team who spoke about what had made them such a potent team (they have been delivering the best results in their business for quite some time) – this just a couple of years after they thought they were a broken team. They all mentioned how they loved what they did and how they did it. They felt inspired by the sense of team.

Then the conversation took a spontaneous turn. They reflected on the quality of their leader and his role in their growth:

He really cared about their well-being as individuals and as a group; he spent hours coaching them; he often had them in stitches with his sharp humour; and most importantly, he believed that they could do anything they set their minds to.

They worked hard to exceed his expectation of them. They wanted to make him proud and enjoyed the challenge of the goals that were set.

This manager’s belief in his people translated into the team believing in themselves.

When Roger Federer walked onto Roland Garros centre court this month, you could see he believed that he would win this grand slam once and for all: his focused swagger and intense stare communicated that he meant business. The newspapers quoted him the morning after the victory saying “I never lost faith” even though he seemed jinxed not to ever win the French title, regardless of being deemed the best tennis player of all time.

“Just remember: in these times – if you are not confused, you don’t know what’s going on!”

In the same way, Tiger Woods struts down the fairway with an attitude of self-belief and single-mindedness. Few people will count him out of the race even when he trails by many shots. His red shirt on the final day is a clear message: dangerous cat already pouncing.

(NB: You might want to consider updating the two previous paragraphs – for obvious reasons... or not?)

Your playing field might be a different one – instead of a tennis court or a golf course you might be doing your thing in meeting rooms, airport lounges or through conference call facilities, yet the impact of belief in yourself and in the task at hand means as much as Tiger’s self-belief when he lines up for a 10-footer.

Critical questions for you, co-traveller, co-citizen, co-leader in 2009 should be:

Do you believe you can?

Do you believe that your team can do it?

Can you believe that this year will bring something good and sustaining, despite your clients’ tight budgets, the consumer go-slow and general despondency?

It would be easy to lose your mojo this year. There are many signs you can misinterpret to make it mean that you are worth less or have less competence than before. If you choose to, you can read the signs to indicate that you are a failure, with no compass to guide you out of the maze.

Just remember: in these times – if you are not confused, you

don’t know what’s going on! You don’t have to understand the detail of the solution before believing that it will be found. You need not have a fully integrated team before believing that they have the ability to create synergy that can shoot the lights out.

Looking at the bigger global issues, the same principle applies. I read a heart-warming quote, delivered by Paul Hawken in his Commencement Address to the Class of 2009, University of Portland, May 3rd, 2009:

“When asked if I am pessimistic or optimistic about the future, my answer is always the same: If you look at the science about what is happening on earth and aren’t pessimistic, you don’t understand data. But if you meet the people who are working to restore this earth and the lives of the poor, and you aren’t optimistic, you haven’t got a pulse.”

If you have lost your mojo in the global economic crisis and struggle to connect with optimism and belief, look closely at the people around you and then a bit closer. Within them lies the energy and resolve to be creative, to turn reality on its head, to pull rabbits out of the business’s hat. Your belief in them turns them into potential superheroes – instantaneously. It is indeed a wonder drug that comes at no cost, yet it requires you to surrender the tight control you try to keep. And despite those scars you carry, continue to back yourself: you can also believe in your own believableness.