



Rewired to Relate - Text

Chapter 5

Being intentional

Being intentional

The brain is a social brain. It monitors others all the time, so we constantly have an impact on each other. If we are to prioritise connection and collaboration, we need to be intentional about the impact we have on each other.

When we are not intentional, we risk triggering limbic reactions in others that make it challenging to connect and collaborate. Being intentional about our thoughts, beliefs and behaviours will make it much easier to communicate and collaborate, improving our working relationships.

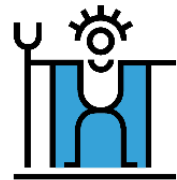
The good news is that you can choose your mindsets and your behaviours and thereby be intentional about the impact you have on your working relationships.

As with learning any new behaviour, prioritising collaboration and connection takes attention and intention and a willingness to make some internal changes to address your external impacts.

Unconscious mindsets

Our mindsets influence our behaviour, sometimes without us even being aware of them. We do not even know they are there, but they create emotions in us which can trigger limbic reactions in others. Consider this scenario to see how a mindset might influence someone's behaviour and then how it impacts others.

SCENARIO: *Rishi is an expert in his field. He has a very specific knowledge set and is more competent than others within his area of expertise. Knowing this, Rishi has an elevated sense of status. And to enhance that, his limbic system encourages him to think that no one knows as much as him. In fact, his limbic system tells him that others are idiots!*



Others can sense Rishi's perception of them when working with him.

How do they interpret his behaviour and react?

REACTION: Their limbic systems will likely feel insulted by Rishi, followed by a status threat (and maybe belonging and autonomy threats as well). These threats will likely lead to their own threat-inspired behaviours.

Your limbic system is likely to sound an alarm in response to Rishi's behaviour. When your PFC does not have the capacity to manage your response, you are likely to end up feeling a Status, Belonging or Autonomy (or other) threat. These threats will likely lead to their own threat-inspired feelings and behaviours.

This is how one person's - Rishi's - unconscious mindset can trigger limbic reactions in others.



Most likely, you will have felt something similar at some point. You will have been on the receiving end of someone who thinks they are smarter or more important than you are. Next time this happens, notice how it makes you feel, and how it influences your perception of the person and your feeling of motivation.

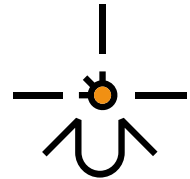
Intentional mindsets

As you saw in the example, if we are not intentional with our mindsets they can make it more challenging for us to be in good relationship with others.

The good news is that you can choose your mindsets and your behaviours and thereby be intentional about the impact you have on your working relationships.

As with learning any new behaviour, prioritising collaboration and connection takes attention and intention and a willingness to make some internal changes to address your external impacts.

MINDSET: Our limbic systems have the capability of creating mindsets that boost our status ("I'm better than others", or "I'm destined for greatness"). These mindsets create dopamine and make us feel good, but they aren't helpful when it comes to relationships with others.



The limbic system also has a way of making us believe passionately in our views; we often think they are the absolute truth. The beliefs you hold passionately are the ones to really examine, because it is likely they are not true.

How mindsets impact behaviour

If people are reacting negatively towards you, it might be because of a mindset or attitude that you hold which impacts your behaviour. Take a look at these three ways that an unconscious mindset could impact your thinking and behaviour.

A critical mindset

If you have a critical mindset, you will likely behave in critical ways.

For example, with a critical mindset, you might regularly correct others, or tell people how to do something 'better' even if it is already good enough. This often creates limbic reactions in others, perhaps a threat to their Status or Belonging. This makes it more challenging to relate to others and work well together.

Confirmation bias

When you have a particular mindset about a person or situation, you will find that your interactions corroborate your expectations.

If you think someone is incapable, the chances are your brain will find a way to prove that is true. If you think they are always right, your brain will find evidence that they are right.

This is called **confirmation bias**.

Imposter syndrome

There are mindsets which will disempower you and have you make decisions that are not helpful.

A classic one, known as "**imposter syndrome**", is when people believe that they do not belong in their position. Unfortunately, many people suffer from this mindset.

For example, consider a team member who does not quite believe they belong in their role. When a serious problem arises, this person may not trust their judgement and, instead of alerting someone about it, the problem may be left to spin out of control and become a very serious issue.

More about mindsets

Mindsets are a collection of beliefs, attitudes and internal thinking that underlie our actions. Some mindsets are helpful and help us succeed and others get in the way and have us feel bad about ourselves.

Mindsets might include overall orientations like a “growth mindset” or “fixed mindset” (see Carol Dweck’s books on mindsets).

We also refer to mindsets as attitudes or statements that work as internal voices that guide us.

Some examples:

“I don’t deserve this”

“I’m destined for greatness”

“People are idiots”

“_____ people don’t deserve_____”

“I’m not good enough”

A mindset might be conscious, but more often it is unconscious and deeply-seated, like unconscious biases. We don’t even know they are there but they still create emotions in us which are felt by others. Mindsets will work with the limbic system to drive our behaviour. In fact, mindsets guide our limbic system’s reactions.

Similarly, there are mindsets which will disempower you and have you make decisions that are not helpful. A classic one, known as **“imposter syndrome”**, is when people believe that they do not belong in their position. Unfortunately, many people -leaders included- suffer from this mindset.

The result is a need to prove oneself worthy of their position or title; the limbic system is desperately trying to get a status reward to counter the ongoing threat created by this mindset. It leads to poor decisions; decisions that are made to prove one’s worthiness, rather than decisions that serve the team or organisation.

In addition, when you have a particular mindset about a person or situation, you will find that your interactions corroborate your expectations. If you think someone is an incompetent, the chances are your brain will find a way to prove that is true. If you think you are an imposter, your brain will also find a way to prove that true! This is called confirmation bias.

Mindsets are powerful, they underpin our actions and can lead to unconscious behaviours and toxic reactions. It will be useful to get curious about your own mindsets and the impact they have on you and others around you.

Fortunately, we can override old mindsets and retrain our brain to think differently. When we do this, we change the instructions that the limbic system follows, it will respond differently, and we will behave differently.

If people are reacting negatively towards you, it might be because of a mindset or attitude that you hold. Take some time to reflect on your own thoughts and beliefs about yourself and others.

How to change a mindset

Intentional mindsets

Having increased your awareness of your mindsets, you can be more intentional with them and improve how you impact and relate to others.

Changing your mindset requires you to first uncover your current mindset.

Mindsets are usually based on a belief or set of beliefs that you have. For this exercise, bring to mind a situation where you realise that you are not having the impact you want to have. Then work through these four key steps that will help you identify and change the underlying belief and mindset behind the situation.

1. Identify your thinking

The first step is to identify what you are thinking about this situation. Your thoughts and beliefs may be subconscious, so ask yourself these questions to begin to uncover them:

What were you thinking about the other person or the situation?

What were you trying to convey to others?

For example, Rishi might realise that he thinks: "I am smarter than them and they should listen to me."

2. Uncover your belief

When you have identified your thoughts, keep asking yourself "why do I think that?" until you find something that feels like a truth to you.

Remember that something that feels like fact to you, might really be a belief.

For example, Rishi might realise that he believes: "I am better than others" and "they are too proud to listen to me".

3. Consider the impact

Take a moment to accept that this 'truth' is only a belief. Consider how this belief or way of thinking may have helped you be successful in the past. Be grateful for that and consider that you can still change it.

Are you willing to change?

For example, Rishi realises that his belief of being better than others helps him feel confident and be successful. But he decides he wants to have a different impact so he will consider other options.

4. Choose an alternative

If your answer is 'yes' and you are willing to change, consider another way to think about the situation. Consciously choose this alternative way of thinking from now on.

For example, Rishi's new thought pattern is, "I can be generous in sharing knowledge with others who don't yet know what I know".

Another example:

Ken noticed that he was always critical of himself. When he looked at why, he found that he was holding this belief:

"I should be as good as the people around me."

Even though those people were experts with many more years of experience. With a little reflection, Ken realised that a new mindset would serve him better and he chose:

"I can learn from others, but I can only do what I know how to do here and now."

This was a life-changing shift for Ken. He was much less stressed and that helped him sleep better, he was more able to ask for help and actually learn from those experts.

Check your assumptions



We go through life making a lot of assumptions. Our brains fill in the gaps when we do not know everything about a situation, which is a lot of the time!

The vast majority of the assumptions we make are partially correct at best, and more often inaccurate. Even so, we might feel that we are absolutely right. These incorrect assumptions can drive our reactions and our impact on others.

It is therefore critically important when we are having limbic reactions or receiving others limbic behaviours, to stop and check for the assumptions that we and the other party have been making. Often it is just our assumptions that lead to misunderstandings, conflicts and cracks in our sense of connection.

Some people will say, "don't assume", but this is next to impossible. Instead, let's admit that the brain is making assumptions all the time and let's learn to pay attention to them and correct them when needed.

What assumptions have you made about a recent situation where there was a misunderstanding?

How can you find out what is really true, even if you feel like you know?

What questions could you ask to check your own assumptions?

Tools in practice:

The impact of being intentional

Being more intentional with your mindset and questioning your assumptions can transform how you relate to your colleagues.

You may find that your collaboration and communication improve, and you are able to achieve more as a team.

Real world stories:

Andrew, Partner Technology Strategist, Global Technology Vendor

"When I give advice to my partners as part of my role, I now aim to be more collaborative in my communication.

Previously, I would share some advice, then go straight ahead and hit them again with more advice right away.

Now I give people space to think and watch for their responses. If I can see from their reaction that they are triggered or resistant, I change my phrasing to help them think differently."

Rhiannon, Senior Manager, Real Estate Investment Company

"We are going through a large-scale culture change at work and several department heads are pre-emptively very triggered in meetings. I have used the Be SAFE & Certain model to reflect on people's reactions and I have recognised that their reactions may be caused by status threats.

This has helped me to adapt how I 'care' for people in meetings to avoid creating ongoing status triggers. This has worked well and I have found that leaders who were previously very triggered are now more open and relaxed in response to emails and in person conversations. It has also helped that I have stopped scheduling any meetings in the afternoon when everyone is more easily triggered and will find it harder to make clear decisions."

Ashwin, Cloud Solutions Strategist, Global Technology Vendor

"I am never stressed by tight deadlines, but I've had feedback that my last minute working impacts others negatively. Previously I would have ignored this feedback, as I prefer my own working methods and thought it was OK as long as we hit the deadline.

Once I became aware of Be SAFE & Certain and how my preferences and assumptions can trigger others, I am now more collaborative in my approach. I check with team-mates what their preferences are for timelines and adapt to the team's needs. I found that this has prevented triggers and frustrations when working to deadlines."

Jim, Managing Director, Technology Services Company

"I shared the Be Safe & Certain model and the concepts of PFC and 'Limbic' with my team directly, and this gave us a common language without jargon that we could use together. This has enabled us to have non-confrontational conversations when issues arose by making the topics less personal."