

Influential and Persuasive Intelligence

THE BELIEF CONTINUUM

**BOOST YOUR LEADERSHIP PLATFORM WITH
ADVOCATES, ALLIES, AND CHAMPIONS INSIDE
AND OUTSIDE OF THE ORGANIZATION**

DONN LEVIE JR.

*The **Belief Continuum** is a model that explains how people's beliefs evolve over time. Whether you're trying to get hired, win a promotion, sign a new client or land that huge consulting gig, you have opportunities along the way of gaining converts to your value and branded expertise as you move through a Belief Continuum with others in a hiring, negotiation, or contract cycle. Learn how this psychological bias can work in your favor with decision makers.*

In a social media universe, your first contact with decision makers and stakeholders often occurs prior to any direct, face-to-face engagement with them. If you want to extend your Belief Continuum, you must first cultivate a degree of mutual familiarity to establish a foundation of trust. That trust can lead to direct, in-person access, and direct access brings you into personal direct engagement with decision makers.

The Belief Continuum is where you persist in demonstrating value and expertise as you move forward through any interview/evaluation/negotiation process to win new clients, customers, champions, advocates, and allies.

Belief Patterns and Belief Perseverance

For many generations, psychologists have studied the reasons why people behave the way they do, and why it is so difficult to modify those behaviors. We now know that people's behaviors are determined by their thinking patterns. So, modifying behaviors require a change of belief patterns and assumptions. *Belief perseverance* plays a role in changing beliefs, as it takes people longer to change their previous beliefs than to develop new ones or modify existing ones.

People tend to be averse to uncertainty. For instance, a change from one belief to another has an inherently disrupting effect, which elicits the necessary emotions from people to avoid certain situations.

Even in the face of empirical evidence that seems overwhelmingly compelling, the persistence or nonoccurrence of beliefs is a clear case in point of the theory's relevance. Lee Ross and Craig Anderson conducted empirical studies to consider this theory, which led them to conclude that beliefs are hard to change even when logical evidence is challenging to deny.

Belief is a powerful factor that drives human behavior and decision-making processes. It is the underlying foundation of our perceptions and judgments about ourselves, others, and the world around us. However, beliefs are dynamic in nature; they can change over time with new experiences, information, or insights.

Your understanding of the strategies and tactics underlying the Belief Continuum can be used in interviews with decision makers and in negotiations with stakeholders to enhance your likeability, favorability, and believability in how your value and expertise will contribute to the future success of the organization.

When Opinions Hold Sway Over Facts

Have you ever tried to make an important decision that's 100 percent rational? Even for a fleeting microsecond, did you consider risk or weigh the logic behind the consequences of that decision? For most people, the response is: probably not.

Our brains have evolved to take the path of least resistance and other short cuts when assessing our everyday environment. It requires too much processing power to navigate in an increasingly complex world. It takes more cognitive effort to enhance awareness, be present, and reflect more deeply — especially for ideas or suggestions that confront those profound beliefs.

That's why we are so susceptible to influence and persuasion strategies — what I call “weapons of mass persuasion.”

People's fundamental beliefs and opinions are kept behind a well-guarded fortress because it keeps out conflicting perspectives through which they see the world. They need a compelling reason offered in a way that touches upon what matters to them before they will consider lowering the drawbridge to adjust their position, opinion, or belief.

They're looking for something to connect you to them; a narrative, a story that makes you relatable and relevant. People buy YOU first because who you are is always more important than what you do, how you do it, and why you do it. That's a universal law; better than that, it's how we are hard wired. It's the first rule of engagement.

The harsh truth is that we humans are emotional creatures, not rational ones, thanks largely to the brain's neurochemistry. Indecisiveness or impulsivity often reflect underlying emotional influences. We hold to our opinions even when presented with facts that refute them in what's called *confirmation bias*.

Naked facts have rarely been enough to change a well-adorned personal opinion.

In such situations, someone's attempt to convert our thinking, opinion, or belief with *more* facts and evidence usually fails; it boomerangs on them. Psychologists call this the *backfire effect*. All because our brain's chemistry hasn't detected emotion-inducing stimulus to lower the drawbridge using the persuasive-fact approach.

We have failed to engage.

Influence and persuasion tactics can also be used as a weapons of manipulation for corrupt, self-serving purposes. Both the ethical and corrupt uses of influential intelligence involve engaging others, positioning of expertise and value, influencing the direction or outcome, and converting others. One approaches creates clients, customer, champions, and allies; the other, misery, regret, and anger.

The way forward with others is through the use of positive, influence language in our communication and an awareness of how we can use cognitive bias to our advantage.

Which is more important: having a good story to tell or telling your story well? Most say having a good story to tell is important; however, how you tell your story is just as important as having that good story to tell.

Unlocking the Belief Continuum

In life, our beliefs play a major role in how we think, feel and act. Our beliefs can limit or empower us — it all depends on the kind of beliefs we profess. How and what we believe shapes our decisions, relationships, and ultimately our life experience.

The Belief Continuum is a powerful concept that can help us unlock and better understand not only our current beliefs and how they influence our lives, but those of others and how you can use them to influence and persuade. It's a concept consisting of three stages: knowing, feeling, and acting.

Unlocking the Belief Continuum is crucial to achieving success in all aspects of life. This continuum refers to the range of beliefs that we hold about ourselves, others, and the world around us. These beliefs can either propel us forward or hold us back from reaching our goals and fulfilling our potential. By understanding this continuum, we can identify limiting beliefs in us and in others that may be hindering our progress and work towards changing them.

At one end of the belief continuum are limiting beliefs. These are negative thoughts that hold people back and prevent them from taking action towards stated goals. For example, believing that you aren't smart enough to achieve a certain career path can stop you from pursuing it altogether. On the other end of the spectrum are empowering beliefs — positive thoughts that motivate and inspire people to take action towards what they want in life.

Identify Stages of Belief

Beliefs are a powerful force in our lives and can affect everything from our behavior to our outlook on life. The stages of belief refer to the steps through which an individual progresses in order to form, accept, or reject a certain belief. By understanding these stages, it is possible to better understand why we believe what we believe and how our beliefs come about.

As a someone wanting to further their career, understanding the extremes of belief or assumptions with decision makers and stakeholders can be crucial to getting the results you want. These extremes range from complete skepticism and cautious consideration (decision makers are taught to say “no”), all the way to full acceptance and trust. By identifying where stakeholders and decision makers fall in this spectrum, you can tailor your approach accordingly and increase your chances of success.

The Belief Continuum helps stakeholders and decision makers progress from a negative or neutral belief to one that enables them to accept the ideal potential of a product, service, proposal, or candidate. When beliefs change, the new, necessary behaviors are stimulated.

In other words, it's the perception decision makers and stakeholders hold that the value (or expertise) of a specific product, service, or individual becomes stronger (i.e., more believable) as that entity progresses further along the stages or rounds of a decision/evaluation/ negotiation process toward a hire or buy decision.

The Continuum of Belief arises as a result of confirmation bias and the priming effect.

Cognitive Bias and the Halo Effect

Most people enter the job interview Belief Continuum by first submitting a résumé and a cover letter in response to an open position. If they get an interview with a decision maker, they continue forward in that continuum. If the decision maker was impressed with that person's expertise and accomplishments, he or she may want the candidate to speak with team members next. This team interview is the next step along the Belief Continuum.

It's possible that the decision maker praised the candidate's experience and accomplishments as a possible future team member to the team. The team probably all received copies of the candidate's résumé to help them assess qualifications for the position.

But what the decision maker has done unknowingly was set into motion a cognitive bias known as the "halo effect" (tendency of someone's positive or negative impression to influence others' perceptions), thereby "priming"^[1] the expectations of some of the team members and possibly positively shaping their candidate evaluations and even recommendations.

If the candidate had a great interview and received favorable evaluations from the team, the Belief Continuum becomes stronger as the candidate appears to be a contender for the open position.

This is all a good thing for candidates, even though they may not have been aware of the effect.

But the next phase is the most important one: it's the gap in time between the last candidate interview and when the decision is made to hire, contract, promote or buy. This gap can be days, weeks, or even months.

Closing the Familiarity and Trust Gap

The Belief Continuum arises with any process that is used to evaluate a candidate, vendor, applicant, or any individual with a chosen outcome at the end of that process. It could be a political campaign to get votes, getting a signed sales contract, getting a promotion or getting hired in a new position. It's how relationships start and progress forward: (1) There's an initial connection; (2) the connection leads to familiarity; (3) the familiarity leads to trust and access; (4) that trust and access can lead to a preference for that brand, product, or proposal so long as the previous steps are not omitted. Some continuums are long; some are brief, depending on the duration of the evaluation process.

The Belief Continuum usually starts with most candidates when a decision maker receives a sales or marketing brochure, a cover letter and résumé, a first-contact phone call, or a job application. The Belief Continuum gets strengthened if the individual is invited for a phone screen interview, even more so if invited for a personal interview. At each stage of the process, **the decision maker(s) belief in the candidate expertise and value is enhanced the longer that candidate remains engaged in the interview/negotiation cycle.** A strong Belief Continuum at the end of any interview/assessment/evaluation process improves the chances of at least being on that decision maker's short list to receive a sales contract, consulting contract, or job offer.

If one or many decision makers who have a need perceive and believe that you offer real value and expertise, you have begun to fulfill that need. That belief strengthens your position as long as you remain a viable candidate. The Belief Continuum is partly a cognitive bias, but it's also about how you **position your branded expertise and value throughout indirect AND direct engagement with decision makers.**

Indirect Engagement

There are two types of indirect engagement: one that takes advantage of social media platforms **prior to** directly engaging a decision maker with face-to-face, in-person interviews (called “pre-engagement”); and the other **after** directly engaging a decision maker with face-to-face, in-person interviews (called “post-engagement”).

Continuous Promotion Strategy

The Belief Continuum works at its full potential when candidates take a continuous promotion approach before, during, and after the interview portion of the evaluation process. Most candidates only begin promoting their value and expertise in direct engagement situations (a first in-person interview) and stop promoting their value and expertise after direct engagement (when in-person interviews have ended).

They go silent between the end of the interview cycle and when the decision is made as to who receives the job offer, the contract, or the purchase order. This period is the most important phase of the Belief Continuum, and it’s not the time to be sitting silently waiting for word from decision makers. You simply cannot leave to chance or mercy that you will be selected. You must actively take away the opportunity from other candidates being considered (what I call your “unfair advantage”) by continuing to promote your value and expertise to decision makers right up to when an offer is imminent.

Research into customer-sales relationships reveals that customers are more likely to engage with and trust sellers when they demonstrate:

- Frequent interaction
- Consistency
- Ability to deliver results

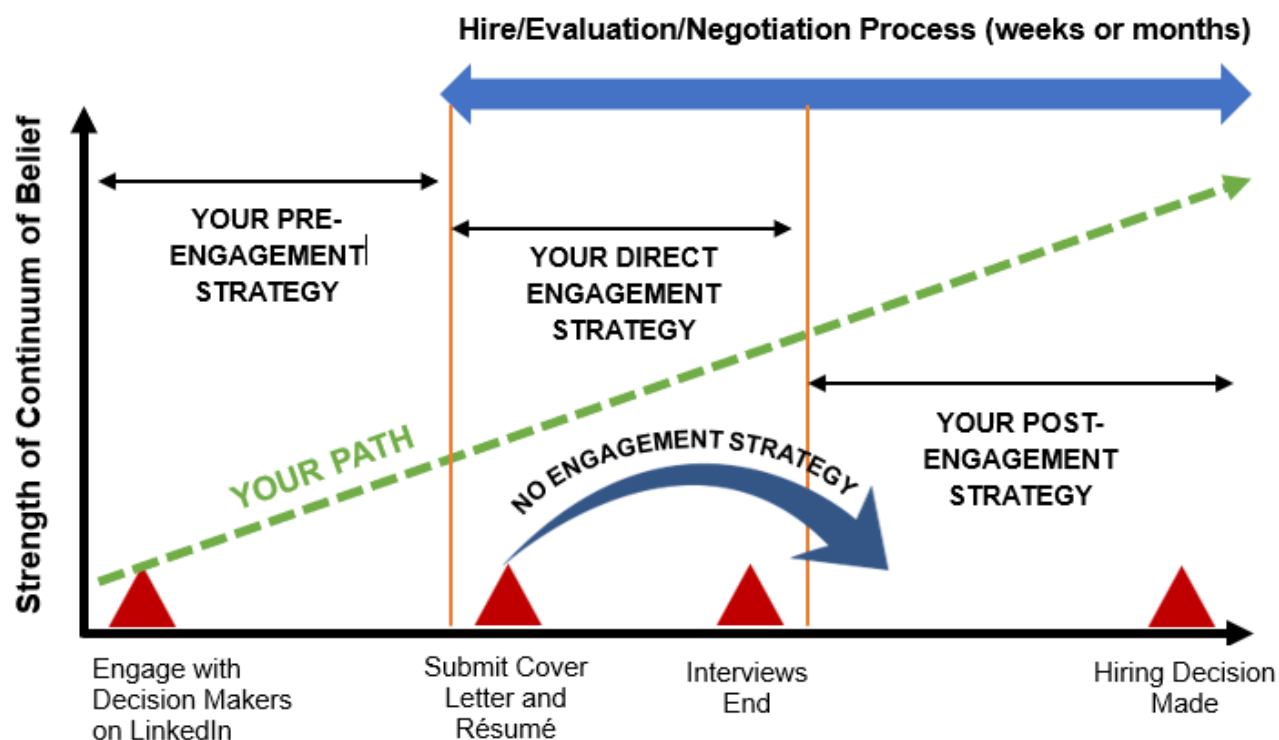
THE BELIEF CONTINUUM: Gaining Converts to Your Value and Expertise

The results are no different for decision makers with hiring authority: the decision maker (the customer/buyer of services) trusts that the candidate (the seller of services) can understand and solve problems and challenges the organization faces, based on the candidate's achievement-focused résumé and cover letter.^[2]

What does indirect engagement look like? It involves research to learn who the decision makers are in an organization long before sending a cover letter and résumé. Start with Google and LinkedIn.

To learn the details on how to initiate and promote a Pre-Engagement Strategy with decision makers in your profession with LinkedIn, download the ebook, *The Mindworm Contagion*.

Here's how the overall Belief Continuum can work for you in a hiring/evaluation/ negotiation process. Let's briefly walk through this illustration below.



In the above graphic, the X-axis is time, the Y-axis is the strength of the Belief Continuum. The **blue double-ended arrow at the top** is a relative hire/evaluation/negotiation timeline from when a job posting or RFP is announced. The **red triangles** represent key events along the timeline.

Your involvement begins before the start of any hire/evaluation/negotiation process where you launch your **Pre-Engagement Strategy** and initiate the Belief Continuum. Here is where you connect with decision makers on LinkedIn, at association or industry conferences, or local chapter meetings — you're looking to engage them and create a degree of mutual familiarity. To use a phrase from best-selling author Harvey Mackay, “dig your well before you're thirsty.” In other words, start cultivating those contacts and relationships before you need them.

Couple of things to notice in this figure. First, look at the strength of the Belief Continuum when you have Pre-Engagement, Direct Engagement, and Post-Engagement Strategies working in your favor (**the dashed green line**). These three strategies are designed to keep your name, brand, and value out front with decision makers right up to when a hiring decision is made. See how much of a stronger position you are in when interviews are finished. You have established familiarity with decision makers during Pre-Engagement, demonstrated your value, likeability, and trust during Direct Engagement, and you'll see how to push that Belief Continuum even higher in Post-Engagement, which is detailed in my ebook, *The Valueocity Factor*.

Next, notice the **blue curved arrow** that represents a candidate who only initiated the Belief Continuum when a cover letter and résumé were submitted. Without an engagement strategy for dealing with the post-interview period, well...as the saying goes, “out of sight, out of mind.” There's no rule that says you can't keep promoting your value and expertise to decision makers after interviews have ended. It bears repeating: The post-interview period is the **most critical** as that's when candidates who made the short list are being evaluated to determine who receives the job offer, the contract, or the promotion.

The hire/evaluation/negotiation process is a social interaction between two or more people with complementary interests: one needs a problem solver and solutions provider; the other offers the expertise to fulfill those needs.

The intangible glue that cements this relationship is personal connection that includes trust, empathy, and likeability.

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Donn LeVie Jr. is a respected leadership influence strategist/ consultant, award-winning author, leadership coach and mentor, and global speaker who focuses on how people speak (linguistics), how they think (cognitive psychology), and how they make decisions (behavioral economics).

In his roles leading people and programs for Fortune 100 companies (Phillips Petroleum, Motorola, Intel Corp.), government agencies (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), and academia (the University of Houston Downtown College – Department of Natural Sciences and Mathematics), Donn has been directly involved with global oceanographic research projects, multi-million-dollar offshore oil and gas exploration programs, high-tech chip design initiatives, and teaching fundamentals of petroleum exploration and production to undergraduate students.

Donn stepped away from the corporate world in 2013 to launch his own firm. Donn LeVie Jr. STRATEGIES, LLC. Over his career he's spoken at more than 70 conferences and since 2011 has been a regular presenter and leadership strategist at the annual Global Fraud Conference sponsored by the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners.

Donn's client and audience list spans organizations from the public, private and education sectors, including the FBI, Dept. of Education Inspector General's Office, New York Port Authority, National Science Foundation, FDIC, Enterprise Holdings, Ernst & Young, the City of Nashville, Franklin and Marshall College, and many more.

As an author, Donn's books have won the Global eBook Award and the International Book Award (*Confessions of a Hiring Manager*, 2012; *Strategic Career Engagement*, 2016). Donn's newly released books, *From the Underworld to the Boardroom: True Tales of Fraud, Corruption, Counterfeiting, and Cons* and *STACKING THE DECK: Career Strategies for Outsmarting the Competition* are available only through Donn's programs.

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