What You Can Do: Beliefs

• **Know what is influencing you**. If you want to make better choices when it comes to setting goals, it’s helpful to understand some of the hidden influences on those choices. By bringing them to light, we can evaluate whether they are right or wrong, and if we want to, lessen their influence.

• **Know what you believe about your abilities**. The goals we set for ourselves are shaped in large part by our beliefs about our abilities. If there are goals that appeal to you, but you have avoided setting them in your life, it’s time to ask yourself why. How sure are you that your beliefs are correct? Is there another way to look at things?

• **Embrace the potential for change**. Believing you have the ability to reach your goals is important, but so is believing you can get the ability. Many of us believe that our intelligence, our personality, and our physical aptitudes are fixed—that no matter what we do, we won’t improve. These entity beliefs focus us on goals that are all about validating ourselves, rather than about developing and growing. Fortunately, decades of research suggest that this belief is completely wrong— incremental beliefs that our characteristics can change over time turn out to be supported by scientific evidence. So if you believe there is something about you that you cannot change, and that belief has shaped the goals you’ve chosen in your life, it’s time to toss it. Embracing the (accurate) belief that you can change will allow you to make better choices and reach your fullest potential.

• **Set up the right environment**. Another powerful influence on the goals you pursue is your environment, and that influence is almost always unconscious. The words we read, the objects we see, the people we interact with—just about anything we encounter can trigger unconscious goal pursuit. Role models motivate us, in large part, through goal contagion. In other words, we adopt the goals we see other people pursuing, provided we see those people in a positive light.

• **Use triggers to tap your unconscious**. To keep yourself motivated, fill your environment with reminders and triggers that will keep your unconscious mind working toward your goal, even when your conscious mind is distracted by other things.