



Roadblocks to Success: Self-limiting Beliefs

Self-limiting behavior comes in many forms. It includes preconceived notions, unhealthy expectations, and irrational thoughts you may have formed about your abilities, skills, and chances of success.

The sum of your experiences over a lifetime, upbringing, education, and the interaction with others - have shaped your beliefs and expectations. Some of these beliefs are rational and helpful and others are irrational and harmful to your performance.

If you examine the psychological makeup of history's greatest athletes, the ones who have broken long-standing records, a pattern exists among them. These athletes had the ability to rise above their own expectations and break records that were considered beyond reach. It's clear that these people were not conformers; they were not confined by the expectations of others. They were open-minded to the idea of breaking records that most people considered out of reach.

Once an athlete overcomes a mental or physical barrier, suddenly the barrier no longer exists and new expectations or limits of what is possible are formed. Before Roger Bannister broke the 4-minute mile barrier, scientists believed that it was physically impossible for a human to cover that amount of ground in less than four minutes because the previous record time of 4:01.3 had stood for nine years. Bannister broke the four-minute mile barrier in 1954 with a time of 3:59.4. That changed everyone's thinking about the mile run. Within four years of Bannister's run, 16 other runners had broken the barrier. When asked to explain his record run, Bannister said, "It's the ability to take more out of yourself than you've got."

Mark McGwire is a modern-day example of an athlete who doesn't cower in the face of legendary records. During the 1998 baseball season, McGwire and his rival, Sammy Sosa, both chased Roger Maris' 37-year-old single season home run record. In 1998, 27 years after Maris' 61 homers, Mark McGwire shattered the record with 70 homers in a season. "I think it will stand for a while. I know how grueling it is to do what I've done this year."

These examples highlight the importance of putting aside preconceptions of what is possible to achieve, not to inherit the expectations of others in society that holds you back, and to rise above one's own doubts in order to break through mental hurdles before breaking through physical ones. Let go of what is and what is not possible to achieve so you can go after your dreams.

