

Hopefully Helpful

The twenty-five advice boxes from Misbelief, collected in one place

Misbelief: What Makes Rational People Believe Irrational Things

Dan Ariely · Harper, 2023

Verbatim transcription, in book order, with book-page references.

Chapters 1, 2, and 12 contain no boxes. Transcribed from the 2023 first edition
for the Misbelief-AI material base · provenance: verbatim-Dan · nothing edited or condensed.

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CHAPTER 3

Pressure, Stress, Bending, and Breaking

HOPEFULLY HELPFUL № 1 • BOOK PAGE 56

Reattribute Stress

Reattributing emotions is something you can try for yourself. It's also something you might try in conversation with someone in your life who is flirting with misbelief. Let's say your friend Tim is showing signs of stress, and he's attributing it to broad, catastrophic narratives about the world that you worry might lead him to embrace destructive falsehoods. You've been keeping an eye on his social media posts, and they have only added to your concerns. You also know that Tim recently got divorced, his kids are away at college, and he's feeling fearful about his future. In talking with him, you might help him connect his feelings to these more specific events in his life rather than attributing them to shadowy forces and nefarious plots. Perhaps you can even help him reframe his life changes as opportunities for freedom and possibilities for self-discovery rather than as disruptive and unexpected events.

HOPEFULLY HELPFUL № 2 • BOOK PAGE 61

Improve Secure Attachment

A high level of secure attachment is quite rare and difficult to create and attain, but any improvements that can be made in this regard will surely help guard against the descent into misbelief. Secure attachment is a continuum, and even a small increase on the scale pays dividends in terms of the way we view upside, downside, risks, potential, and the actions that we're willing to take. The more securely attached we are, the more resilient we are, and the less we need alternative stories to explain the world around us.

Secure attachment begins in childhood. So if you are a parent and would prefer not to raise a misbeliever, this is something you can work on directly with your own children, ensuring that they feel you are there for them, you trust them, and they don't need to fear abandonment. In adulthood we can increase our secure attachment through forming and maintaining deep and trusting relationships that will buffer us in times of stress. We can also be that buffer for others in our lives and, in the process, protect them from the tendency to fall into misbelief.

Support a Misbeliever

It is difficult to eliminate stress entirely, but it is important to reduce it, particularly in the early stages of the funnel, before people become fully committed to an alternative narrative. Providing reassurance to someone in stressful circumstances can make a big difference. We may be unable to mitigate the causes of the stress, but if we can make the person feel seen and supported, it goes a long way toward slowing the spiral of grasping for answers and control. One specific approach to stress reduction that we tested in my lab at Duke University was to make people feel that they are smart and successful. We found that after such reassurance, they were less likely to go down the funnel of misbelief. This type of reassurance has a calming effect by letting people know that they are emotionally safe and are not under attack or underperforming. It can short-circuit the search for a villain to blame or a story to explain. Our experiments focused on in-person interactions, but even in online relationships reassurance may play a more positive role than we would expect. In general, humans tend to underestimate the effectiveness of emotional support and fail to appreciate how much even the smallest reassurances matter.

Offering support and reassurance sounds like a simple action, but if you're dealing with a misbeliever who is expressing alarming ideas and saying things that you think are outlandish, it's not a simple task. And when we are under stress ourselves, it can be easy to tend to our own needs first—in line with the old “Put on your own oxygen mask first” advice. But in this case, that's a mistake. The early stages of stress are the time when we can have the most impact on a person who is in the process of moving into misbelief. This is why we need to take stress more seriously both in ourselves and in our loved ones. Once someone progresses further into the funnel and their cognitive processes and social bonds reinforce their misbelief, it is much harder to reach them.

How to Have a Nondebate

Listen and support; don't argue. When someone comes to us with a flood of grievances and stories about who's to blame, it can feel like they're inviting a debate and want us to argue and explore the ideas they're expressing. There's a sense that they're searching for the truth. And if we disagree with their views, we may feel compelled to refute their claims. In reality, people need to feel heard, seen, validated, and understood in order to create the conditions for any kind of fruitful discussion. The first thing to understand is that the real issue is not the facts, allegations, and stories; the real issue is emotional. We can empathize with someone even if we don't agree with their interpretation of why they are suffering. Simply acknowledging where they're coming from and empathizing with their pain, without trying to correct them, goes a long way. And if we then move into a debate, we'll be starting from a much better place.

These principles have been tested by Joshua Kalla and David Broockman in an approach called deep canvassing. Deep canvassing starts by asking sensitive questions, listening to the answers with real interest, and then asking follow-up questions as a way to start a conversation. Why is this approach more likely to be effective? Because in the standard argumentative approach we tend to start counterarguing (at least in our heads, but sometimes out loud, too) before the other person has even finished laying out their arguments. This is obviously not a way to have a productive discussion about anything.

The crux of the “not really being in the mindset to be persuaded” problem is our almost universal need to be correct, including the need to be associated with groups that do the right thing. When our feeling of being correct is challenged, it threatens our identity, and we work hard to fend off the attack and protect what is so important to us: our feeling that we are correct.

Deep canvassing helps combat this dynamic, because it starts with a genuine interest in understanding and an open-minded attitude. When an exchange starts with this approach, some of the defense mechanisms are reduced and both sides can become a bit (just a bit; remember, this is not magic) more open-minded.

Picking a Villain as a Way to Regain Control

HOPEFULLY HELPFUL № 5 • BOOK PAGE 83

Learn to Enjoy the State of Ambiguity

Ambiguity is an uncomfortable feeling for most people. As such, it's one that we tend to quickly misattribute, concluding that something must be wrong. But in fact, ambiguity can be a productive, even positive state. When we conduct research, we try to encourage ourselves, our students, and our colleagues to enjoy a state of ambiguity. The logic is that when we don't know the answer, real knowledge can arise, so it is best to go slowly, think carefully, and enjoy the process of trying to find out what is going on. Sadly, this love of ambiguity is an uncommon mindset. Usually we want quick and clear answers, especially when we are stressed. For some people, this antipathy to ambiguity contributes to their descent into misbelief. The ability not to rush to conclusions, to keep multiple hypotheses in mind, and to remain open to new information and possibilities is key to not getting sucked into misbelief. We tend to admire and seek out conviction and confidence. But we would be better served if we learned to admire and enjoy a state of ambiguity.

The idea that we can learn to enjoy the state of ambiguity seems, at first glance, to go against human nature. After all, don't we want certainty? And doesn't any hesitation mean that something is wrong? Though a taste for ambiguity may not come naturally, it can be acquired, like other good things in life. Think for a moment about something you initially hated but developed a preference for over time. Maybe it was coffee, beer, experimental jazz, or bitter food. If we can acquire a taste for these things, why can't we develop a taste for ambiguity and learn to enjoy and embrace it? My sense is that this is not only possible but easier to achieve than a liking for hot sauce (which, by the way, directly stimulates our pain receptors but nevertheless we can learn to enjoy it). Once we acquire the taste for ambiguity, we may discover that it makes life more interesting.

Don't Assume Malice

When bad things happen to us and we think that they are done intentionally, we suffer even more. Personally, I try to hold on to a slightly modified version of the principle known as Hanlon's razor. The original Hanlon's razor states, "Never attribute to malice that which is adequately explained by stupidity." Stupidity, however, is a harsh term, and I believe that the original intention of the saying was not really about stupidity but about irrationality and human fallibility. Here's my slightly modified version: "Never attribute to malice that which is adequately explained by human fallibility." This suggests that when bad things happen to us and the people we love, we should look farther and deeper into the underlying reasons for the events and seek explanations that don't involve intentionality or malice and instead involve mistakes, lack of consideration, impulsivity, emotions, or a whole range of other human quirks.

Believing in the slightly modified Hanlon's razor principle not only takes away some of the sting of intentionality; it also increases the odds that we will understand the real reasons for what went wrong and simplify the path toward improvement.

Three Razors

To counteract the attraction toward complex stories featuring evil villains, it is useful to keep three "razors" in our cognitive hygiene bag. The term razor is used to describe certain heuristics, or cognitive shortcuts, that can help to quickly "shave" away unnecessary information and complexity and get us more quickly to the truth. We discussed two of them above: the slightly modified Hanlon's razor, "Never attribute to malice that which can be adequately explained by human fallibility," and Occam's razor, "The simplest explanation is the one we should favor, until it is proven to be inadequate." To these we can add Hitchens' razor, named after Christopher Hitchens, the late literary critic, journalist, contrarian, and staunch atheist: "What can be asserted without evidence can also be dismissed without evidence." Together, these three tools can prevent us from falling into a spiral of misbelief. They invite us to ask questions such as: Is it reasonable to assume malicious intent over stupidity, human fallibility, or chance? Is it sensible to propose a complex web of ill intention? Do I have the necessary evidence to support such an extraordinary claim? If the things we're trying to explain don't pass the test of these three razors, it's a sign that we should take a step back and suspect that we're onto the wrong explanation. We can also use these three razors in conversations with others to challenge their biases toward intentionality, complexity, and insufficient evidence.

Don't Be Part of the Silent Majority

“If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all” is the kind of advice we used to get from our grandmothers. Unfortunately, the internet seems to work on the opposite principle: it's the people who have something nice to say who tend to be quiet, while those who are angry, hateful, and full of negative feelings are much more motivated to express them. When I was under attack by the misbelievers, terrible things were written on my personal Facebook wall every day. I know that they were seen by many, many people who knew that they were untrue. Some of those people reached out to me personally. But it was very rare for anyone to say something publicly—to post a comment or a reply that retaliated against the hate. Of course, on one level this is understandable, because the moment we speak up, we risk becoming a target of hate ourselves. But the sum total of all that silence has long-term negative consequences and makes the internet look like a much more hateful place than it really is. In reality, the haters are only a small percentage of any given population, but they take up a lot of space. So my lesson from this is that when we have something nice to say, we should say it.

Be Suspicious

One of the tricks of fake news or misinformation is that it is often designed specifically to feed on human weakness and to get us excited about the story unfolding in front of us. This has a few important implications. First, when we consume information, we need to put on heavy-duty suspicion glasses. This is not a fun way to live, I realize, but it is very important. It is particularly important to be cautious before we share information and unintentionally contribute to the further spread of fake news. Second, before sharing anything, we need to understand that we're not just passing the information along, we are attaching our reputation to it, giving it our stamp of credibility, as if we vetted and are recommending it. Would you enthusiastically recommend that a friend purchase something you'd never tested yourself? Probably not. But you may be unwittingly doing this with information every day. Again, suspicion and caution aren't the most pleasant lenses through which to view the world, but in the realm of information we would all be served well to adopt them more often.

Our Search for the Truth We Want to Believe In

HOPEFULLY HELPFUL № 10 • BOOK PAGE 121

Challenge Your Beliefs

Interrogating our own convictions is easier said than done, but a tried-and-true method was proposed by the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates. The Socratic method, as it is known, is based on posing a hypothesis and then challenging it. There are two ways to challenge a hypothesis: either by seeking alternative explanations or by testing whether it is falsifiable. For example, you might come up with a hypothesis that the 2020 US presidential election was rigged by foreign actors. But then you would ask yourself: What other explanations might there be for the result of the 2020 elections? Maybe a majority of voters simply preferred the candidate who won. And you might ask: What would it take for my hypothesis to be untrue? Perhaps the numerous recounts and voting safety measures in place would help undermine the hypothesis. In this way, the Socratic method can be used to interrogate ourselves and keep us honest. I'd recommend that you do it on paper rather than just thinking it through in your head. As discussed earlier, it's too easy to fool ourselves into thinking that we've answered a question in our heads when in fact we have not. The simple act of writing something down with pen and paper makes a big difference. The Socratic method can also be used in a conversation with a misbeliever. Rather than simply refuting or denying their hypotheses, it is better to question them about possible alternative hypotheses and falsifiability.

Another useful method for honestly questioning our own beliefs is to ask ourselves whether a neutral third party would come to the same conclusion as us. What if that person did not share our current biases in viewing the world or even perhaps held opposite views on the topic at hand? What would they say? How might they challenge our hypothesis?

Change the Way You Search

Search engines are a tool most of us use every day, but we often don't realize the degree to which they can support our confirmation bias. Have you noticed how, when you begin typing a query, the search engine offers ways to complete the query, affirming that lots of other people have that question as well? Have you also noticed a tendency in yourself, when searching for information related to a deeply and dearly held belief, to type in the thing you are trying to prove? If so, you're not the only one. Most of us do this. For example, if we believe that vaccines cause autism, we might search for the phrase "vaccines cause autism." This will lead us to content that confirms our belief. Too often, we think we are simply searching for a topic when we are really searching for our biased view of the topic. The flood of results we get further confirms our bias. I hope that one day, search engines will be designed to protect against confirmation bias. But until that day, we should do our best to counter it ourselves. Try typing in the opposite of what you believe. In the example above, that would mean searching for "vaccines do not cause autism." Doing both searches will lead to more nuanced and comprehensive search results and will guard, to some degree, against confirmation bias.

CHAPTER 6

Working Hard to Believe What We Already Believe

HOPEFULLY HELPFUL № 12 • BOOK PAGE 140

Drop the Defensive Mindset and Be a Scout

In conversations with others, especially in difficult conversations, it's easy to default to a mindset of defending our territory. However, shifting out of that mindset can lead to a much more productive conversation. It is also useful to try to encourage the other person to make the same shift, but it's harder to change someone else's mindset than it is our own. Julia Galef refers to the posture of defending our territory as a “soldier mindset.” According to Galef, adopting a soldier mindset in conversations entails viewing reasoning as a form of defensive combat, in which our values are at risk and we would do anything to defend them from opposing views. She suggests that we should adopt a “scout mindset” instead. Unlike the soldier, whose job it is to defend their territory, the scout's role is to explore and investigate. This requires having an open and inquisitive mind to properly map the territory. In other words, scouts are interested in what is true, what is out there in the world, whereas soldiers are hyperfocused on defeating threats. So always remember, if you want to avoid falling into misbelief, try to be a scout, not a soldier.

HOPEFULLY HELPFUL № 13 • BOOK PAGE 144

Hesitate to Negate

When someone shares a piece of misinformation, it is very tempting to say “That thing you just said—X—is not true.” This approach—repeating a statement and negating it—seems intuitively appealing, and in the short term it works. But the problem is that in the long term it can become less effective and sometimes can even backfire. Why? Because of two psychological quirks. The first is the illusory truth effect, wherein the more we encounter a piece of information (or misinformation), the more intensely the piece of information is coded in our brains as familiar and true, and the “stickier” it becomes. As you might have experienced, this particular quirk of human nature has not escaped the attention of advertisers and politicians. A strategy for taking advantage of this basic human quirk is attributed to Joseph Goebbels, who said: “Repeat a lie often enough and it becomes the truth.” Or maybe Goebbels didn't actually say it but everyone thinks he did because of the illusory truth effect?

The second quirk is that because of the way our memory works, the two parts of the negating statement are stored separately in our minds. In the short term we code them as “X” and “X is not true,” but over time, the link between them becomes weakened and this connection between the

two statements loses its strength. As mentioned above, the illusory truth effect means that repetition is important, which is why the statement X ends up being judged as more true in our minds, while “X is not true” is largely discounted.

These observations give rise to two very clear recommendations. First, try not to let the illusory truth effect take hold from the start; this means that it is best to approach misbelievers with alternative and true information before they are exposed to a particular piece of misinformation, X, too many times. Second, we want to reduce our exposure to X. It is a much better approach to give an alternative story. Instead of saying “This thing you just said, X, is not true,” say instead, “Y is true, and here is the evidence for it.” Don’t even mention X.

HOPEFULLY HELPFUL № 14 • BOOK PAGE 149

Start with Better Solutions

Understanding how solution aversion works can be tremendously helpful in defusing conflicts and creating more productive dialogue. It reveals that our amazing ability to ignore or deny an obvious problem might really be resistance to the proposed, or even implied, solution. With this in mind, it is best to begin a dialogue by explicitly taking solutions off the table and trying to agree on the problem—for example, by highlighting and affirming that both sides are committed to the issue and care about mitigating it, even if they might go about it in different ways. An even better approach is to start the conversation by proposing solutions that will not be as objectionable to either side and, only when we have done away with fears of possible solutions, try to find common ground on the facts of the problem.

HOPEFULLY HELPFUL № 15 • BOOK PAGE 158

Paradoxical Persuasion

Given the amazing flexibility of the cognitive system and our ability to quickly defend ourselves against incoming information and disarm it, what type of persuasion might have an impact? One effective approach is that of overly agreeing with the person you want to persuade—not just agreeing but taking a more extreme perspective than they do. Often, as we’ve seen, people confidently adopt a position and assume that they understand its implications without really thinking it through. When you take their suggestion even more seriously than they take it themselves, you expose the shallowness of their position. Someone tells you that all pharma companies are evil? Agree with them. Then suggest that they should stop taking all medications and cancel their medical insurance immediately. Someone tells you that 5G is dangerous? Agree with them. Suggest, in fact, that they might get rid of their cell phone altogether and rely on landlines. Or maybe that’s not enough. Perhaps they should consider moving to Green Bank, Virginia, a town where there is no Wi-Fi and cell phones are banned in order to protect the city’s resident giant telescope. Pull up some real estate listings for them. Sure, there would be downsides to living in a tech-free zone, but it would be worth it, right, if 5G is going to kill us all?

This approach turns out to be rather effective at making people reconsider their extreme positions.

HOPEFULLY HELPFUL Nº 16 • BOOK PAGE 160

Challenge the Illusion of Explanatory Depth at Home

Sit down with Uncle Joe and ask him to explain in depth how the mechanism of his pet misbelief works. How exactly is 5G changing people's cells, and how is it different from a microwave in the kitchen? How is the United Nations, an organization that could not stop the war in X (put your favorite sample here), able to control the world? How exactly is the government controlling the weather? The point is to try to follow the recipe for the illusion of explanatory depth test and get Uncle Joe to realize that he does not know as much as he thought he did about what he believed before you started talking.

What if Uncle Joe is unwilling to discuss his pet misbelief? Or what if his misbelief is such a hot-button issue that you don't feel comfortable bringing it up in the short time you have together? Or what if the last time that you brought up the topic the argument was so painful that you just don't have the energy to go down that path again? Interestingly, it seems that there is a way to manage such sensitivities and diffuse the illusion of explanatory depth. As Ethan Meyers and his colleagues demonstrated, reducing the illusion of explanatory depth in one domain can help reduce it in other domains as well. For example, they showed that after proving to people that they didn't really know how a zipper worked, those same people also started doubting their own knowledge of how snow is formed. And although Meyers and his colleagues did not test the extent to which such transference of healthy self-doubt can occur for very strongly and centrally held beliefs, as is often the case with misbelief, their results suggest that this is possible. So if the discussion with Uncle Joe about his pet misbelief is not very promising, it is okay to start with his understanding of more mundane and less controversial topics—such as how his hoodie stays zipped.

Lessons on Personality from Alien Abductees

HOPEFULLY HELPFUL № 17 • BOOK PAGE 192

Risk Assess Your Friends

Because personality is difficult to change, it's important to be aware of the personalities of those around us and pay particular attention to those who are most susceptible to going down the funnel of misbelief. (We'll look at more examples of what traits make people susceptible in the next chapter.) The recommendation here is not to avoid friendships with people who display these traits; after all, the personality characteristics that make people susceptible can be quite positive. Some, such as narcissism or a tendency to misremember, are largely negative. But others, such as creative ways of thinking and connecting dots or even a tendency to be suspicious, can in many cases be useful and even desirable. It's only when other factors, such as stress, begin ushering a person down the funnel that these traits begin to operate in more negative ways.

So if you notice that a person you care about seems to have personality characteristics that might render them at a high risk for going down the funnel of misbelief, pay extra attention to this person and try especially hard to prevent them from going down the funnel. The earlier you can intervene, the better.

CHAPTER 8

An Attempt to Classify the Role of Personality in the Funnel of Misbelief

HOPEFULLY HELPFUL № 18 • BOOK PAGE 211

Practice Intellectual Humility

The old adage “Fake it till you make it” can be useful when it comes to increasing intellectual humility. Just inserting certain phrases into our conversations is a good start. Try these: “I’m not sure”; “I may be wrong”; “I wish I knew more about the topic”; “To the best of my knowledge.” You may not even believe them at first. But saying them can serve as a reminder that perhaps we don’t know as much as we think we do, and such statements can also shift the general tone of the conversation, inviting more intellectual humility in others as well.

Another way to increase intellectual humility is, from time to time, to take the opposite position from the one we are very sure about and argue against ourselves to the best of our ability. An even more potent form of this approach would be to make these arguments publicly in front of our friends, but if this is too embarrassing, try arguing in private to start with.

A study by Tenelle Porter and Karina Schumann tested another approach that entailed adopting a growth mindset attitude toward intelligence. In their study, participants who were encouraged to view intelligence as a psychological construct that can be improved over time (growth mindset), as opposed to viewing it as static and unable to be changed over time (fixed mindset), exhibited greater intellectual humility and were more open to learning from an opposing point of view.

HOPEFULLY HELPFUL № 19 • BOOK PAGE 221

Tend to Your Narcissists

You know those people in your circle whom you scored as just a little above normally narcissistic? Give them a little extra love, affirmation, or encouragement; remind them of their place in your social circle and the part they play in the grander community; or just give them a hug. It might keep their frustrated need for attention from leading them astray.

Ostracism, Belonging, and the Social Attraction of Misbelief

HOPEFULLY HELPFUL № 20 • BOOK PAGE 233

Start with Common Ground

In the social realm, the discussion or argument style of “us versus them” is inherently unproductive. When people are in their “soldier mindset” (as discussed in chapter 6), they don’t listen carefully, and they constantly counterargue in their mind. My guess is that they finish making their mental counterarguments even before the other person has finished their sentence. And because we’re all so good at making arguments to justify whatever position we hold, the conversation goes nowhere. This is why it’s incredibly important to first establish commonalities, connections, shared interests, and so on, even with someone whose beliefs are very different from our own.

In his book *How Minds Change: The Surprising Science of Belief, Opinion, and Persuasion*, the science journalist David McRaney delved into some of the most effectively proven methods of changing minds, especially on controversial and loaded topics. Across all the methods he explored, which include deep canvassing (from chapter 3), Street Epistemology, and Smart Politics, the first step is always to establish rapport. In other words, make sure the other person knows that you are a friend, let them know that you are not here to shame them, and communicate that you are interested in hearing their story and having an open conversation about it. In the context of this part, this is a good way to make sure that whoever you are talking to, be it a misbeliever or not, does not feel ostracized and sees you as part of their in-group rather than as part of an out-group.

Finding a way to be in an in-group with a misbeliever doesn’t mean you have to accept or agree with everything they say. It’s okay to find some of their beliefs offensive or dangerous. But like one of those Venn diagrams where two circles overlap in the middle, you can find some point of intersection. The in-group/out-group framework is a particularly useful approach because in an in-group, we can talk about joint goals and joint struggles. To apply this approach, first pick a topic for which it’s clear that you and the person you’re talking with have joint things to work on—something local, perhaps, such as housing prices or increased crime. Or find a common human issue that features in both of your lives, such as raising teenagers. In this way, you will send the message that the ways in which we’re the same are much larger than the ways in which we differ.

Fight the Temptation to Ostracize

If you're wondering how we can stop people we know and love from tumbling down the funnel of misbelief, here's one important suggestion: try to not ostracize them, even subtly. After all, social ostracism starts with the people who are not misbelievers (nonmisbelievers?) turning away from the misbeliever. If misbelief has infected someone in your life, you are probably guilty of this understandable but unhelpful behavior. After all, it's not easy to have the same conversations again and again about ideas that seem obviously untrue and even offensive—not to mention that these conversations can turn family gatherings into ideological battlegrounds. Understandably, it can be embarrassing to invite that person to a party and find them sharing their theories with family, friends, or work colleagues. It's easier to just turn away, let their calls go to voicemail, stop inviting them over, ignore their social media posts, or even block them. But it's dangerous. Those of us with friends and family who start to slip into the funnel of misbelief have the power and responsibility to do something about it. We can recognize that even a small amount of social ostracism can have a powerful negative effect—likely greater than the people who are ostracizing realize or anticipate. Instead of ostracism, it is important to show social support, even if it feels difficult and uncomfortable to do so.

The Social Accelerator

HOPEFULLY HELPFUL № 22 · BOOK PAGE 254

Don't Take Extremity Too Literally

Understanding the social role that extreme opinions play in establishing identity and demonstrating loyalty can help us in situations where extreme opinions are being expressed by someone we know and love. When your best friend from college starts sharing her beliefs about how Jewish bankers are running the world, it's easy to take offense and stop answering her calls (especially if you're Jewish, but even if you're just an empathetic human who dislikes hateful stereotypes). Though you have every right to feel that way, as we've discussed, it's not terribly productive to stop talking to your friend, as it might just accelerate her descent into misbelief. The first time she expresses such opinions, you might recognize that she is in a dangerous position and slipping deeper into the funnel. Her words may have less to do with her actual beliefs and more to do with her enmeshment in a community of misbelievers. When we have the presence of mind to see beyond our own feelings of offense, we are sometimes able to lend a helping hand before the funnel pulls our friends further in.

HOPEFULLY HELPFUL № 23 · BOOK PAGE 266

Listen to Former Insiders

There are people who have “left” groups such as QAnon, and some of them have willingly shared their stories publicly and graciously explained their experience of indoctrination and their descent into misbelief. There is so much to learn from their experiences. I believe that people like this, as well as the friends and family members of former misbelievers, have a critical role to play in helping others climb out of the funnel and even preventing people from stepping over the brink in the first place. This is another reason why it is so important not to ostracize the misbelievers in our lives. If we do and they eventually find a way out of the funnel, they'll feel shame and resentment and be much less likely to speak openly about their experiences.

Can We Afford to Trust Again — and Can We Afford Not To?

HOPEFULLY HELPFUL № 24 · BOOK PAGE 276

Practice Trust

Trust, in many ways, is like meditation. It is all about practice, and the more we practice trust, the better we get at it. This means that at times of extra stress and tension, increasing our trust in the people around us in ways that make them feel more trusted and more in control can have positive spillover effects. This isn't easy, especially when our instincts tell us to withdraw our trust and protect ourselves. Here are a few simple ways you can practice trust: Make yourself vulnerable and reveal more personal information to your close friends. Finalize agreements with a handshake, rather than lawyering up. When you go out to dinner with someone, pay for the meal and tell them they can pay next time. All of these might seem like small steps, and they are, but that is the point when practicing trust.

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Invite Trust by Demonstrating Care

To create trust, we need to demonstrate that we're willing to put others' interest above our own. Here's an example of this. Imagine that a server in a restaurant approaches a table of four and asks, "What can I get for you tonight?" The first guest says they want the fish. The server replies that the fish is not good today and he'd recommend the chicken. It's cheaper and better, he adds. Now imagine the same server with the same table, only in this instance the server recommends the steak over the fish. It is twice as expensive, he adds, but it's amazing. For each table, we measure how likely each diner is to take the server's recommendation about the food and how likely it is that each table will take his advice about the wine. As you might guess, the guests at the first table are much more likely to follow the server's advice. Why? Because the server was willing to sacrifice something (overall revenue from the meal and the size of the tip) from their own utility for the benefit of the guests (a costly signal, as we discussed in chapter 10). In the second case, the server might be giving good advice, but the guests can't tell if he's trying to help them or himself. If we want to create trust, we first need to show people in a tangible way that we care about them more than we care about ourselves.