

Your Self-Limiting Beliefs

A self-reflection worksheet for lab leaders and senior researchers

The beliefs that drove your success as a researcher can quietly work against you once you step into a leadership role. This worksheet helps you identify which of your own beliefs may now be holding you and your team back and offers you an opportunity to reframe those beliefs so that they work for you and your team.

Read each belief below. If it resonates, answer the two questions in the space provided. At the end of the worksheet, use the table to reframe each of the beliefs you explored.

“My way is the right way”

You set the bar by your own abilities and unconsciously expect others to meet it. It may show up as frustration when someone struggles with something you find straightforward, or as quietly redoing their work.

How do you feel when members of your team seem less driven than you?

What is the cost of expecting your team to work just like you?

“I don’t want to be wrong”

Fear of being wrong can lead you to hold back ideas, avoid decisions, or over-consult. In research, where uncertainty is inherent, this belief can slow both you and your team down.

When you hold back in a meeting, what are you protecting yourself from?

What would you do differently if you knew that failure would not define you?

“I can’t let go”

A belief that no one else can do something as well as you. It may come from genuine care for quality, but it prevents your team from developing and it makes you a bottleneck.

What fear surfaces when you think about stepping back from something?

Is your involvement adding value or is it preventing someone else from growing?

“I provide value through knowledge”

Many leaders in science have developed the belief that their authority is based in what they know, despite recognising that the value of the lab is in what it discovers. This can hold leaders back when the people they lead have greater subject knowledge or technical expertise.

When someone on your team knows more than you, how do you feel?

What decisions have you made this week that required leadership rather than expertise?

Your action plan

You're going to reframe these limiting beliefs. A reframe is not positive thinking. It is a deliberate shift in what you believe your job is; from the beliefs that served you as an individual researcher to ones that fit the role you are now in. Take the belief 'My way is the right way.' It probably drove real success. But as a leader, holding everyone to your own standard creates frustration for you and stunted development for your team. A reframe of that belief might be: 'My job is to help people reach their own standard of excellence.' The underlying value (quality) stays. What changes is who is responsible for achieving it.

The action plan below gives you space to write your own reframe and one concrete step to act on it. For each belief that resonated, write your reframe and one concrete action you will commit to.

My belief	My reframe	My action
My way is the right way		
I provide value through knowledge		
I can't let go		
I don't want to be wrong		

Want to go deeper?

EMBO Lab Leadership is a course designed specifically for life scientists. Our workshops give you practical tools to work through beliefs like these – and to build a research environment where your team can do their best work.

Find out more at embolableadership.org