

The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy (SFP)

The origin of the SFP is from the story of the Greek Mythological sculptor Pygmalion, who carved a marble statue of his idea of the most beautiful woman. The statue of the woman was so beautiful that Pygmalion fell deeply in love with her and named his love Galatea.



The goddess of love, Venus, feeling sorry for Pygmalion, turned the statue into a real woman. From this story come two terms which we use today.

1. The **Pygmalion** effect
2. The **Galatea** effect

From the story above, Pygmalion was the sculpture, and Galatea was the creation of his belief. Here's a short story about the Pygmalion and Galatea effects in action to see how this works.

Sam joined the company knowing that he had a lot to learn, and he was worried that he would struggle and not meet the required standard in 6 months when his probation would be decided upon. He didn't want his probation period extended, as his pay would be increased once he passed his probation.

After three weeks, he felt that he was struggling. Babak noticed this and joined him one day at lunch and chatted with him. Sam opened up to Babak and told him he believed that he wasn't doing well enough and didn't believe he could make the grade. Babak replied that he thought he was doing quite well and, in fact, he had made fewer errors than most people at this stage of training. Sam's face lit up, and he sounded better already.

Babak kept this positive reinforcement up. He coached Sam where he needed it and encouraged him. Most importantly, he would praise him, and on occasions, he even praised him in front of his colleagues. Gradually Sam started to believe that he could make the grade and focused on getting the best results to prove his value to the company.

While Babak was acting as Sam's Pygmalion, he was boosting his confidence and creating that self-belief within Sam. Something was happening. This change within Sam was that he began to believe in his ability, which was the Galatea effect taking effect within Sam. Babak's influence as his Pygmalion was no longer required as Sam now believed in himself. The two movies below are based on this story:



Pygmalion (1938) – George Bernard Shaw - <https://www.filmsite.org/pygm.html>

My Fair Lady (1964) - George Cukor - <https://www.filmsite.org/myfa.html>

The more we genuinely show others we believe in them, in their ability to do something, to work towards something, and we recognise their efforts and praise them when appropriate, the more they will believe in themselves and bring about their own Self-Fulfilling Prophecy.

But, the SFP can have a negative and demoralising impact as well. If you take the example of Sam and Babak above and make Babak critical and uncaring, it is most likely that Sam's performance would not improve but worsen as he'd believe he couldn't improve.

Belief really can create Reality