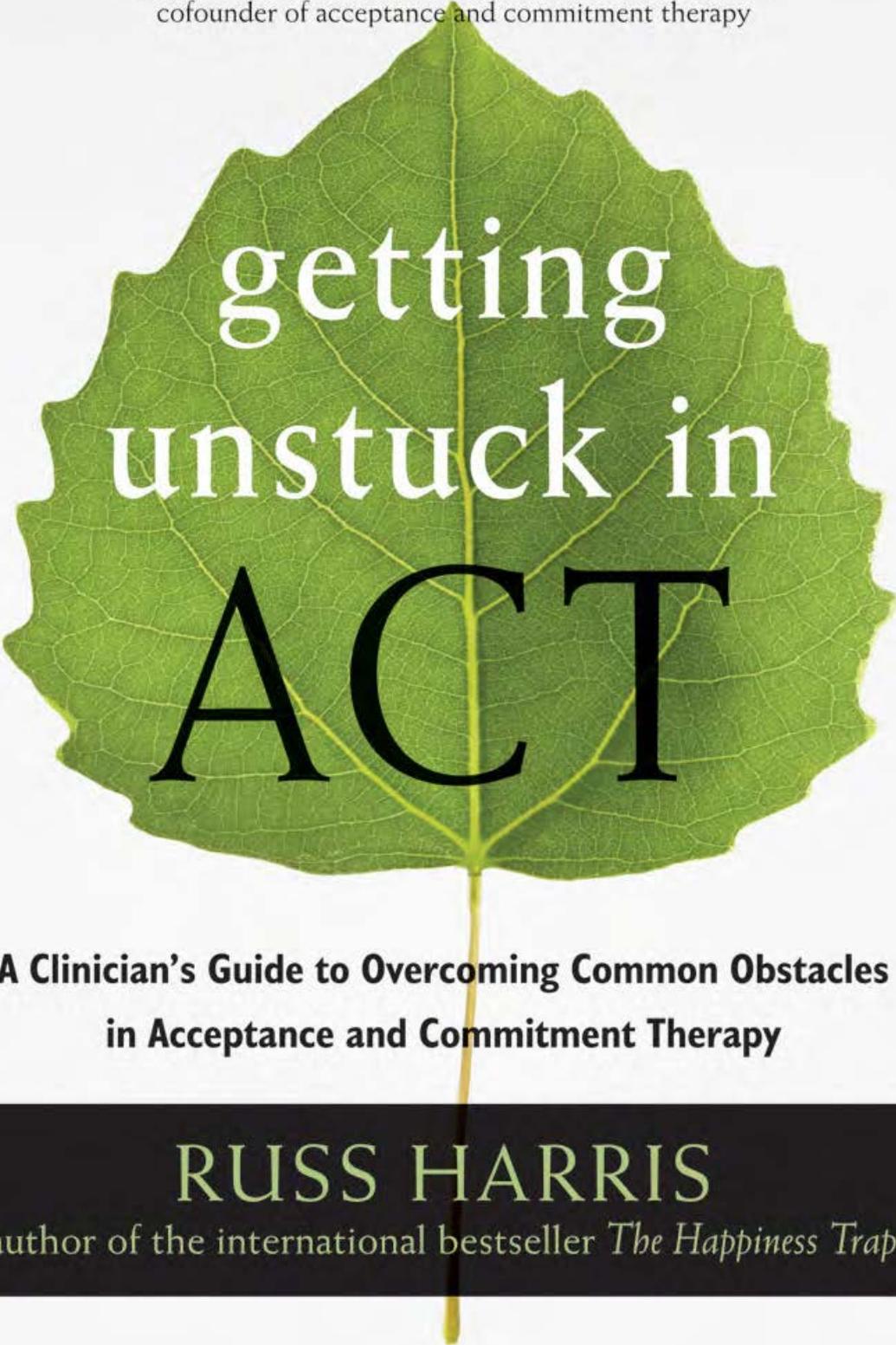


“I learned a lot reading [the book] and if you do ACT work, you will too.
Highly recommended.” —STEVEN C. HAYES, PhD,
cofounder of acceptance and commitment therapy



getting
unstuck in
ACT

**A Clinician's Guide to Overcoming Common Obstacles
in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy**

RUSS HARRIS

author of the international bestseller *The Happiness Trap*

The Brief Case Conceptualization Worksheet: Notes

I recently updated and improved The Brief Case Conceptualization Worksheet from chapter 2 of 'Getting Unstuck In ACT'. (Alas, it was too late to include those changes in the book.) So you'll find this worksheet is not as brief as the one in the book. However, I hope and expect you'll find it's far more useful. (And if you've been using my case conceptualization worksheet from ACT Made Simple, then make sure you switch over to this new one, pronto.)

In addition to what is described in the book, you'll find the following:

Under FUSION, I have spaced out the seven main categories, to help you identify them more clearly. Commonly, most if not all of these categories are interconnected and overlapping, so you may want to draw arrows between them, to show the connections.

Under UNWORKABLE ACTION, you'll find the sub-category of avoiding important people, places, situations, and activities. The more experientially avoidant your client, the more likely he is to be escaping, avoiding, withdrawing, quitting, or procrastinating in many important areas of life.

In the VALUES & COMMITTED ACTION section, I have asked you to identify important skills the client may be lacking, or not using effectively; and in particular to identify deficits in the capacity for 'task-focused attention'.

And in the MY BARRIERS section, you are asked to identify the difficult thoughts and feelings that show up for you, as you work with this client – so you can respond to them with defusion and acceptance.

The worksheet follows on the next two pages.

What does the client want from therapy/coaching? What does he/she describe as the main problem(s)?

Are there any external barriers (as opposed to psychological barriers) to a rich and full life - e.g. legal, social, medical, financial, occupational problems that will require active problem solving and/or skills training?

UNWORKABLE ACTION

What is the client doing that makes his life worse, or keeps her stuck, or worsens his problems, or inhibits her growth, or prevents healthy solutions, or worsens health, or damages relationships etc?

What people, places, events, activities, situations and challenges is the client avoiding or escaping (e.g. withdrawing from, quitting, procrastinating, or staying away from)?

FUSION: (Include examples of specific thoughts, as well as of processes such as worrying, etc.)

PAST & FUTURE: (*rumination, worrying, fantasizing, blaming, predicting the worst, reliving old hurts, idealizing the past or the future, flashbacks, 'if only ...', why did it happen? etc.*)

SELF-DESCRIPTION: (*self-judgments, self-limiting ideas about 'who I am' or 'what I can and can't do'*)

REASONS: (*reasons the client gives for why she can't, won't or shouldn't change, or why his life can't be improved*)

RULES: (*about how myself, others, life should be: look for key words such as: 'should', 'have to', 'must', 'ought', 'right', 'wrong', 'always', 'never', 'can't because', 'won't until', 'shouldn't unless' etc*)

JUDGMENTS: (*mostly these will be negative, but sometimes positive; may be about anyone or anything: other people, oneself, one's job, one's body, one's thoughts and feelings, the past, the future, or even life itself*)

OTHER: (*any other unhelpful cognitions: beliefs, ideas, attitudes, assumptions, etc. Include anything the client says that upsets, annoys, confuses or scares you, or makes you feel stuck.*)

EXPERIENTIAL AVOIDANCE: (*Private experiences the client is trying to avoid, get rid of, or is unwilling to have*)

THOUGHTS/IMAGES/MEMORIES:

FEELINGS/ SENSATIONS/URGES:

VALUES & COMMITTED ACTION

IMPORTANT LIFE DOMAINS: *(What domains of life seem most important to this client - e.g. work, study, health, parenting, intimate relationship, friends, family, spirituality, community, environment)?*

VALUES: *(What values seem important within those domains?)*

GOALS & ACTIONS: *(What values-congruent goals and activities does the client: a) already have; and b) want to pursue?)*

NEED FOR SKILLS-TRAINING: *(What important skills does the client lack or fail to use e.g. problem solving, goal setting, self-soothing, assertiveness, communication, conflict resolution, time management, relaxation, empathy?)*

NEED FOR TRAINING ATTENTION SKILLS: *Does the client have the ability for 'task-focused attention': to maintain, shift, broaden, or narrow the focus of attention as required for the task at hand?*

RESOURCES: *(What strengths, skills and personal resources does the client already have, that could be utilized? What external resources could potentially be accessed?)*

MY PERSONAL BARRIERS: *(What difficult thoughts and feelings show up for me?)*

BRAINSTORM: *What questions, exercises, worksheets, metaphors, tools, techniques and strategies can I use in the next session? What sort of skills-training may be required? Is practical problem-solving required for external barriers?*

Spot The Function

In chapter 4 of 'Getting Unstuck In ACT', I asked you to do an exercise in functional analysis: to see if you could come up with 'triggers' (antecedents) and 'payoffs' (reinforcing consequences) for three different types of behavior. Keep in mind, the triggers and payoffs will vary enormously from person to person; one person's triggers for alcohol or gambling or suicidal behavior may be totally different from another person's. So the examples I've given below may be extremely different to the ones you came up with.

Triggers (antecedents) Situations, thoughts, and feelings that immediately precede the behavior	Behavior Something an organism does	Payoffs (reinforcing consequences) Immediate outcomes of the behavior that keep it going
At home, alone Feelings of loneliness, boredom, sadness 'I can't stand feeling this way' Urge to use drugs	An addictive behavior - e.g., drug use	Painful thoughts, feelings, urges disappear Feel good
Lunchtime at work Feelings of anxiety 'I've got nothing to say', 'I'm boring', 'They won't like me' Urge to go off alone	Social withdrawal – goes off to lunch alone	Anxiety disappears Get to avoid any possibility of rejection Get to avoid awkward social situation Feeling of relief
Intimate relationship has just ended Feelings of sadness, loss, hurt, anger, anxiety 'I'll never get over this', 'I can't live without her', 'Life is pointless' Urge to commit suicide	Suicidal behavior e.g., threatens to kill himself	Gains attention Gains help and support Gains some relief from his pain

A Bit More about ‘Payoffs’

In chapter 4 of ‘Getting Unstuck In ACT’ I mentioned that the 4 major ‘payoffs’ (reinforcing consequences) for most types of unworkable behavior, are:

1. We get to feel good.
2. We get to avoid or get rid of uncomfortable thoughts and feelings.
3. We get to escape from an unpleasant situation.
4. We get attention.

However, in addition to these, it’s worth considering another 3 common payoffs:

5. We get our needs met
6. We feel like we are ‘problem solving’
7. We feel like we are ‘making sense’ of things

We get our needs met

Suppose I shout at the kids when they are fighting, squabbling, and not listening to me. And suppose they then listen up and obey me. This outcome may well be reinforcing: it meets my needs for obedience, cooperation, peace and quiet.

For another example, suppose my need is to motivate myself: to get myself to do something difficult that I have been avoiding. Sometimes beating myself up – i.e. being highly self-critical - can provide that motivation. This outcome could then reinforce self-criticism.

We feel like we are ‘problem solving’

Cognitive processes such as rumination, worrying, dwelling on problems, self-analysis (‘Why am I like this?’ ‘Why do I keep doing this?’), plotting revenge, planning suicide, fantasizing about leaving a relationship etc., all share something in common: they are all forms of ‘problem solving’. Therefore, they often convey the sense that ‘I am working hard to solve my problems’, which can, not surprisingly, be highly reinforcing.

We feel like we are ‘making sense’ of things

Cognitive processes such as harsh self-criticism, self-judgment, and self-blame can have a reinforcing consequence of helping us make sense of life. For example, if I judge myself as a ‘worthless loser’ that can help me make sense of why I get rejected, or why I fail, or why I am unemployed etc.

Intermittent Reinforcement

Note that a behavior doesn’t have to have reinforcing consequences every single time it happens, in order for that behavior to persist. Sometimes, the reinforcing consequences only happen intermittently. So for example, ‘beating myself up’ may only sometimes motivate me to take action on important issues; at other times, it may make me feel hopeless, and give up. However, those times where it does intermittently motivate me may be reinforcing enough to keep the behavior going over time, even if most of the time it just demotivates me.

Triggers, Behavior, Payoffs Worksheet

On the next page, you’ll find a simple triggers, behavior, payoffs worksheet which lists all seven of the most common ‘payoffs’ for unworkable behavior. You can use it as suggested in chapter 4.

Triggers <i>(situation, thoughts, and feelings that immediately precede the behavior)</i>	Behavior <i>(what you do)</i>	Payoffs <i>(immediate outcomes of the behavior that keep it going)</i> 7 common payoffs to consider: <i>avoid/escape an unpleasant situation/event</i> <i>avoid/escape unpleasant thoughts/feelings</i> <i>feel good</i> <i>gain attention</i> <i>get my needs met</i> <i>feel like I am 'problem solving'</i> <i>feel like I am 'making sense' of things</i>

EXERCISE: Clarify Your Values

Below are some common values. (They are not ‘the right ones’; merely common ones.) Please read through the list and write a letter next to each value, based on how important it is to you: V = very important, Q = quite important, and N = not important.

1. Acceptance/self-acceptance: to be accepting of myself, others, life, etc.
2. Adventure: to be adventurous; to actively explore novel or stimulating experiences
3. Assertiveness: to respectfully stand up for my rights and request what I want
4. Authenticity: to be authentic, genuine, and real; to be true to myself
5. Caring/self-care: to be caring toward myself, others, the environment, etc.
6. Compassion/self-compassion: to act kindly toward myself and others in pain
7. Connection: to engage fully in whatever I’m doing and be fully present with others
8. Contribution and generosity: to contribute, give, help, assist, or share
9. Cooperation: to be cooperative and collaborative with others
10. Courage: to be courageous or brave; to persist in the face of fear, threat, or difficulty
11. Creativity: to be creative or innovative
12. Curiosity: to be curious, open-minded, and interested; to explore and discover
13. Encouragement: to encourage and reward behavior that I value in myself or others
14. Excitement: to seek, create, and engage in activities that are exciting or stimulating
15. Fairness and justice: to be fair and just to myself or others
16. Fitness: to maintain or improve or look after my physical and mental health
17. Flexibility: to adjust and adapt readily to changing circumstances
18. Freedom and independence: to choose how I live and help others do likewise
19. Friendliness: to be friendly, companionable, or agreeable toward others
20. Forgiveness/self-forgiveness: to be forgiving toward myself or others
21. Fun and humor: to be fun loving; to seek, create, and engage in fun-filled activities
22. Gratitude: to be grateful for and appreciative of myself, others, and life
23. Honesty: to be honest, truthful, and sincere with myself and others
24. Industry: to be industrious, hardworking, and dedicated
25. Intimacy: to open up, reveal, and share myself, emotionally or physically
26. Kindness: to be kind, considerate, nurturing, or caring toward myself or others
27. Love: to act lovingly or affectionately toward myself or others
28. Mindfulness: to be open to, engaged in and curious about the present moment
29. Order: to be orderly and organized
30. Persistence and commitment: to continue resolutely, despite problems or difficulties.
31. Respect/self-respect: to treat myself and others with care and consideration
32. Responsibility: to be responsible and accountable for my actions
33. Safety and protection: to secure, protect, or ensure my own safety or that of others
34. Sensuality and pleasure: to create or enjoy pleasurable and sensual experiences
35. Sexuality: to explore or express my sexuality
36. Skillfulness: to continually practice and improve my skills and apply myself fully
37. Supportiveness: to be supportive, helpful and available to myself or others
38. Trust: to be trustworthy; to be loyal, faithful, sincere, and reliable
39. Other: _____
40. Other: _____

YOUR VALUES: *What really matters to you, deep in your heart? What do you want to do with your time on this planet? What sort of person do you want to be? What personal strengths or qualities do you want to develop?*

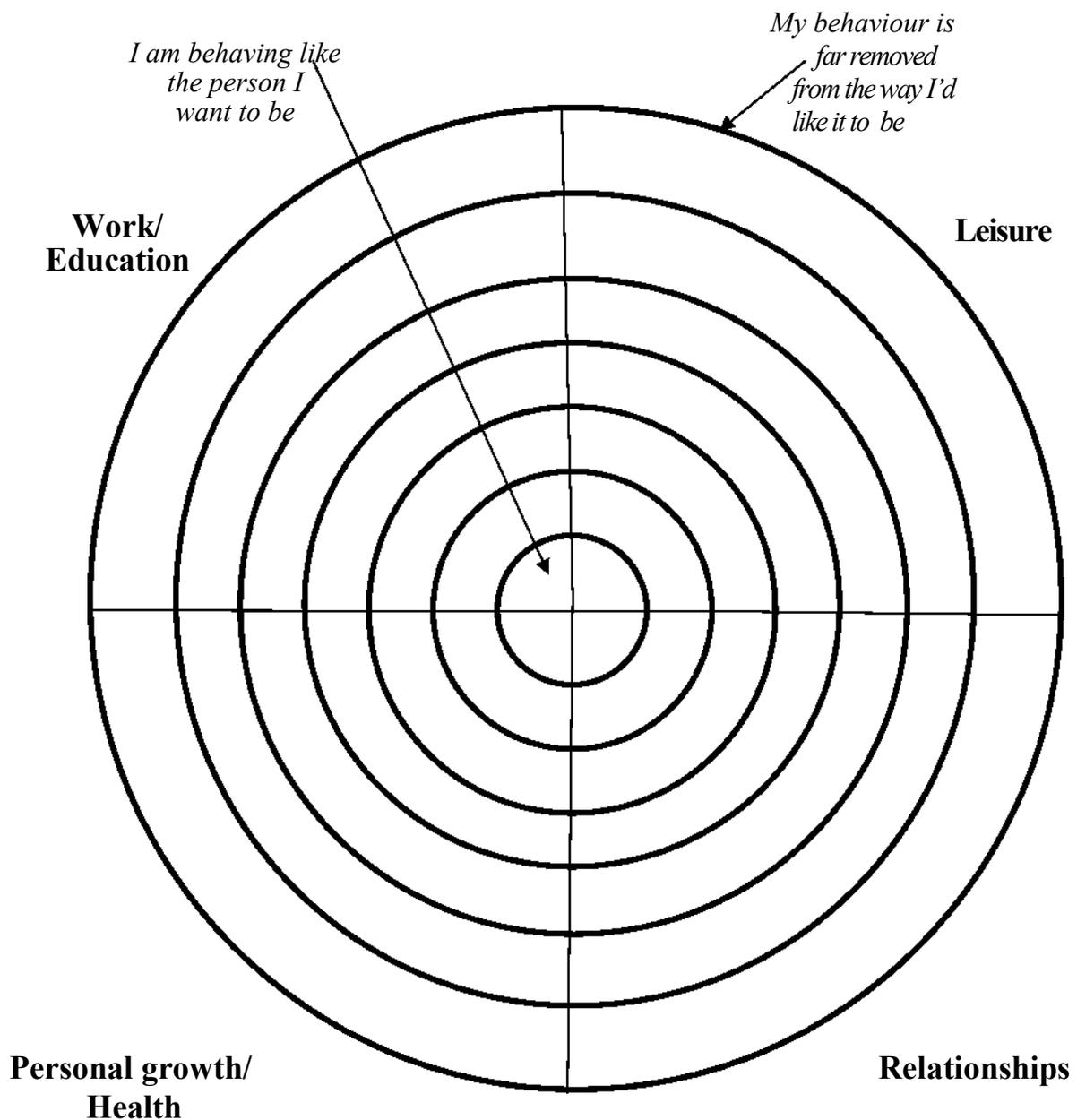
1. Work/Education: includes workplace, career, education, skills development, etc.

2. Relationships: includes your partner, children, parents, relatives, friends, co-workers, and other social contacts.

3. Personal Growth/Health: may include religion, spirituality, creativity, life skills, meditation, yoga, nature; exercise, nutrition, and/or addressing health risk factors like smoking, alcohol, drugs or overeating etc

4. Leisure: how you play, relax, stimulate, or enjoy yourself; activities for rest, recreation, fun and creativity.

THE BULL'S EYE: make an X in each area of the dart board, to represent where you stand today.



How To Cope With A Difficult Dilemma – by Russ Harris

At times we will all get caught up in difficult dilemmas: ‘Do I stay in this job/relationship/house/neighbourhood /marriage/country/career – or not?’, ‘Do I have this operation/ sign this contract/ have children – or not?’, ‘Do I do what *they* want me to do, or do I do what *I* want to do?’ This tip sheet is to help you cope with such stressful situations.

Step 1: Acknowledge There Is Probably No Quick Fix

If you’ve been grappling with a major dilemma it’s highly unlikely that you’ll reach a final decision today. It could possibly happen, but it’s not likely. For example, many people consider leaving their marriages or their careers for several years before they finally do it.

Step 2: Analyze the Costs and Benefits

Sometimes we can resolve a dilemma with a classic cost-benefit analysis: write a list of all the costs and benefits for each option. If you’ve already done this and it hasn’t helped, fair enough—at least you’ve tried. But if you haven’t yet done this, or you’ve done it only halfheartedly, or you’ve done it in your head but not on paper, then definitely give it a try. Mindfully write down all of the costs and benefits of each option, on paper or on a computer. Note: this is a very different experience than thinking it through mentally or talking it through with a friend – and sometimes it is enough to help finalize the decision. However, the inconvenient truth is that the greater the dilemma, the less likely this method is to be helpful. Why? Because if one option was obviously better than the other, there wouldn’t be a dilemma in the first place!

Step 3: Recognize That There Is No Perfect Solution

There’s no perfect solution to this dilemma. If there were, you wouldn’t have a dilemma in the first place. So whichever choice you make, you’re likely to feel anxious about it and your mind’s going to say, *That’s the wrong decision* and point out all the reasons why you shouldn’t do it. If you’re waiting until the day there are no feelings of anxiety and no thoughts about making the wrong decision, you’ll be waiting forever. Anxiety and self-doubt are guaranteed, whichever option you choose.

Step 4: There’s No Way Not to Choose

Whatever your dilemma, you’re *already* making a choice. There’s actually no way *not* to choose. Each day that you don’t quit your job, you’re choosing to stay. Until the day you hand in your resignation, you’re staying there. Until the day you start that course, you’re choosing not to take it. Until the day you stop using contraceptives, you’re choosing not to have children. Each day that you don’t leave your partner, you’re choosing to stay. Until the day you pack your bags and move out of the house, you’re staying. Each day that you don’t sign the consent form for the operation, you’re choosing not to have surgery. And in the career-versus-family dilemma, you’re already choosing how many hours you spend at work and how many with your family.

Step 5: Acknowledge Today’s Choice

Given you’re already making a choice, start off your day by consciously acknowledging it. For example, when you wake up in the morning, you could say to yourself, “Okay, for the next twenty-four hours, I choose to stay in this relationship.” Or “For the next twenty-four hours, I choose to keep using contraceptives.” Or “For the next seven days, I choose to remain in my job.” Or “For the next week, I choose to spend X hours at work and Y hours with my family.”

Step 6: Take a Stand

Take a stand based on your values. You’re already making a choice, so you can enhance your sense of vitality and well-being by acting on that choice, guided by your values. Ask yourself: ‘What do I want to stand for in the next twenty-four hours?’ ‘What values do I want to live by in this area of life?’

If you’re staying in your relationship for one more day, ask yourself, ‘What sort of partner do I want to be for this one day?’ If you’re staying in your job for another day, what sort of employee do you want to be for that one day?

If you choose for one more day not to have the operation, then how do you want to spend those twenty-four hours?

In the family-versus-career dilemma, you might ask yourself, ‘During the hours I spend with my family, what sort of parent do I want to be? And during the hours I spend at work, what sort of worker do I want to be?’

How To Cope With A Difficult Dilemma – by Russ Harris

Step 7: Make Time to Reflect

Put aside time on a regular basis to mindfully reflect on the situation. The best way to do this is as in step 2: use a diary or a computer to write down the costs and benefits of each option and see if anything has changed since last time you did this. You could also try to imagine what life might be like—both the positives and the negatives—of going down each potential path. For example, in the family-versus-career dilemma, one path might be spending thirty hours with the family and fifty hours at work per week, and another path might be spending forty hours with the family and forty hours at work per week.

For most people, a reflection time of ten to fifteen minutes three or four times a week suffices, but you can do as little or as much as you like. The key thing is that the time be spent in *mindful* reflection. Don't try to do it while also watching TV, doing housework, driving, going to the gym, cooking dinner, and so on. The aim is to just sit quietly with your pen and paper, or a computer, and do nothing but write down and reflect on the pros and cons of each choice for as long as you think is useful. Most people find ten to fifteen minutes three or four times a week is more than enough.

Step 8: Name the Story

Throughout the day, unhook yourself from unhelpful thoughts that can easily pull you into worrying, ruminating, or 'analysis paralysis.' An effective way to do this is by 'naming the story'. *Therapist:* Throughout the day, your mind will try to hook you back into the dilemma, to get you going over it again and again. That's only natural. But if that were truly helpful, you'd have resolved this by now. (After all, how many hours have you already spent thinking about this?!) So whenever your mind tries to hook you, try saying to yourself, "Aha! Here it is again. The 'stay or leave' story. Thanks, Mind." Then push your feet into the floor, get present, and focus your attention on doing something meaningful. You might also find it helpful to remind yourself, "I'll think about this later, mindfully, in my reflection time."

(Note: when naming the story, come up with your own individualised name for it: e.g. the 'different job' story or the 'work versus family' story or the 'have a child' story – or simply the 'dilemma' story.)

Step 9: Practice Expansion

Feelings of anxiety will almost certainly arise—again and again and again—no matter which option you choose. So practice "expansion" when they do so. Breathe into those feelings; open up and make room for them; acknowledge to yourself, "Here's anxiety"; and remind yourself, "This feeling is normal. It's what everybody feels in a challenging situation with an uncertain outcome."

Step 10: Have Self-Compassion

Last but not least, we develop self-compassion. Talk to yourself gently and kindly, and unhook yourself from unhelpful, self-judgmental mind chatter using whatever defusion techniques work best for you. Remind yourself that you're a fallible human being, not some high-tech computer that can coldly analyze the probabilities and spit out the "perfect" answer. And remind yourself, this is a very difficult decision; if it were easy, you wouldn't have a dilemma in the first place.

Three Possible Outcomes for Your Dilemma

There are 3 possible outcomes:

1. In some cases, over time, one option will start to look obviously better than the other; this will then make your decision easier.
2. In some cases, over time, one option will no longer be available. This means, the decision is made for you.
3. In some cases, over time, the dilemma will continue, without any resolution. In these cases keep cycling through the steps above. Practice lots of self-compassion, and mindfully live by your values in the face of this ongoing stress.

TEN TIPS FOR MOTIVATING YOURSELF TO PRACTISE NEW SKILLS OR PURSUE IMPORTANT GOALS – by Russ Harris

1. Link the Goal To Values

Values can provide a deep motivation that helps to sustain the practice of new skills, or the pursuit of challenging goals, even when it's boring, tedious or anxiety-provoking (as it so often is). Ask yourself: is this really important to you? What is it that matters enough, that you'd even *think about* doing something like this? What values would underlie this course of action? How would doing this make a positive difference in your life? If we can link our new behavior to something personally meaningful, we're far more likely to do it!

2. Set Goals Effectively

A wealth of research shows that if we set goals effectively, we significantly increase the chances of following through on them. A simple acronym for goal-setting is: S.M.A.R.T.

S = Specific

What specific actions will you take?

If a goal is vague and non-specific (e.g. I'm going to really be there for my kids this week) it's going to be hard to know if you have achieved it or not. So change it to a specific goal (e.g. I'm going to get home at 4pm on Friday and take the kids to the park to play basketball.)

M = Meaningful

What values will you be living by, when you do this?

If the goal is not meaningful – i.e. aligned with values – why bother? Either set a new one that is meaningful, or explicitly link the current goal to values, so it becomes meaningful (e.g. remind yourself “Doing this would be living my values of being loving and caring.”)

A = Adaptive

How will this action be adaptive for your life (i.e. make your life better)? What are the likely benefits?

If the goal seems likely to have more costs than benefits – then change it. For example, if the value is justice, and the goal is to “Punch anyone who treats me unfairly”, then clearly this is going to be maladaptive (i.e. make your life worse).

Be clear about the benefits, and remind yourself what they are e.g. “Practicing this mindfulness skill will help me to handle anxiety-provoking situations more effectively.”

R = Realistic

Is the goal realistic for the resources currently available - which may include time, energy, money, physical health, social support, and so on?

If not, modify the goal so that it *is* realistic for the available resources; or else put it to one side and make a new goal. (Of course the new goal might be to get the necessary resources for the original goal.)

T = Time-framed

What day, date, and time will this occur, and for how long will you do it?

A time-frame contributes to the specificity of the goal.

3. Take Small Steps

The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. So if the goal seems too big, make it smaller. If ten minutes of mindfulness practice is too much, cut it back to five. If doing it daily is unrealistic, perhaps do it every second or third day, or weekly.

Ask yourself: “On a scale of zero to ten, where ten is ‘I’ll definitely do this no matter what’ and zero is ‘There is absolutely no chance I’ll ever do this’ – then how likely are you to actually do this?” If you score less than seven, best to change the goal to something smaller and easier.

4. Carrot Versus Stick

Many people try to motivate themselves through being harsh, judgmental, self-critical, or punitive. But if beating yourself up were a good way to change behavior, wouldn't you be perfect by now?

Learn to “drop the stick”: unhook yourself from excessive expectations and harsh self-judgments, and instead practice self-acceptance and self-compassion. Then “create a carrot” by linking your action to values, and reflecting on the likely positive outcomes. For example, ask yourself, “If I do this, what will I be standing for?” or “If I do this, what will the benefits be, in the long term?”

TEN TIPS FOR MOTIVATING YOURSELF TO PRACTISE NEW SKILLS OR PURSUE IMPORTANT GOALS – by Russ Harris

4. Carrot Versus Stick- continued

Acknowledge every little step “in the right direction”. Pay attention to what you are doing, and notice what difference it makes in your life. Find ways to reward yourself for following through. These rewards may be as simple as saying to yourself “Well done. You did it!”, or keeping a record in a journal, or reporting your progress to others who are supportive.

5. Anticipate Obstacles

When you commit to a goal, it’s helpful to ask yourself, “What might get in the way of that?” As the saying goes, “forewarned is forearmed”. So once we have identified obstacles to action, we can then plan how to get around them. And if there is no possible way around an obstacle? Then clearly we’ll need to set a different goal, and make room for our inevitable disappointment or frustration.

Some of the most common obstacles to the intended course of action are activities that compete with it for time and energy. In such cases, we can ask ourselves, “What am I willing to give up, or do less of, or say ‘no’ to, in order to free up time and energy for doing this?”

6. Confront the Costs

Although the ‘carrot’ is far more useful than the ‘stick’, at times it is important for us to realistically and deeply connect with the costs of *not* following through. We may compassionately and gently ask ourselves, “If I keep on doing what I’m doing: What is it costing me, in terms of health/wellbeing/relationships? What am I missing out on? What will my life be like: one year from now? Two years from now? Ten years from now?”

7. Cultivate Willingness

The practice of new skills is often boring or tedious; and the pursuit of goals that pull us out of the “comfort zone”, almost always generates significant anxiety. So if we are unwilling to make room for discomfort, then obviously we will not take action. So we can ask ourselves: “Am I willing to feel some discomfort, in order to do what matters?” or “Am I willing to make room for sweaty hands, and a knot in my stomach, and a tightness in my chest, and a voice in my head that tells me scary things, if that’s what I need to make room for in order to do the things that really matter?” This of course, overlaps with our first strategy: linking the goal to values.

If you are unwilling to make room for the inevitable discomfort, you may need to a) work on acceptance skills; b) enhancing the link to your values; or c) setting an easier goal that elicits less discomfort.

8. Defuse From Reason-giving

The mind is a reason-giving machine, and as soon as we even *think* about doing something that pulls us out of our comfort zone, it cranks out all the reasons why we can’t do it, shouldn’t do it, or shouldn’t even have to do it: *I’m too tired, I’m too busy, it’s not important, it’s too hard, I’m not good enough, I can’t do it, I’ll fail, I’m too anxious*, and so on. And if we wait until the day our mind stops reason-giving, *before* we do the things that really matter in life ... we’ll never get started. So if fusion with reason-giving is a major barrier to action, then naturally we target it with defusion: e.g. “Aha! Here it is again. The ‘I can’t do it story’. Thanks, mind!”

9. Enlist Support

Social support is often hugely motivating. Can you find a partner, friend, relative, co-worker, or neighbor, with whom you can share his aspirations and achievements? Someone who will encourage and support you? Acknowledge your successes and cheer you on? Is there a group or a course you could join that might serve this purpose? Can you find an “exercise buddy” to go running with, or a “study buddy” to help you with homework?

10. Use Reminders

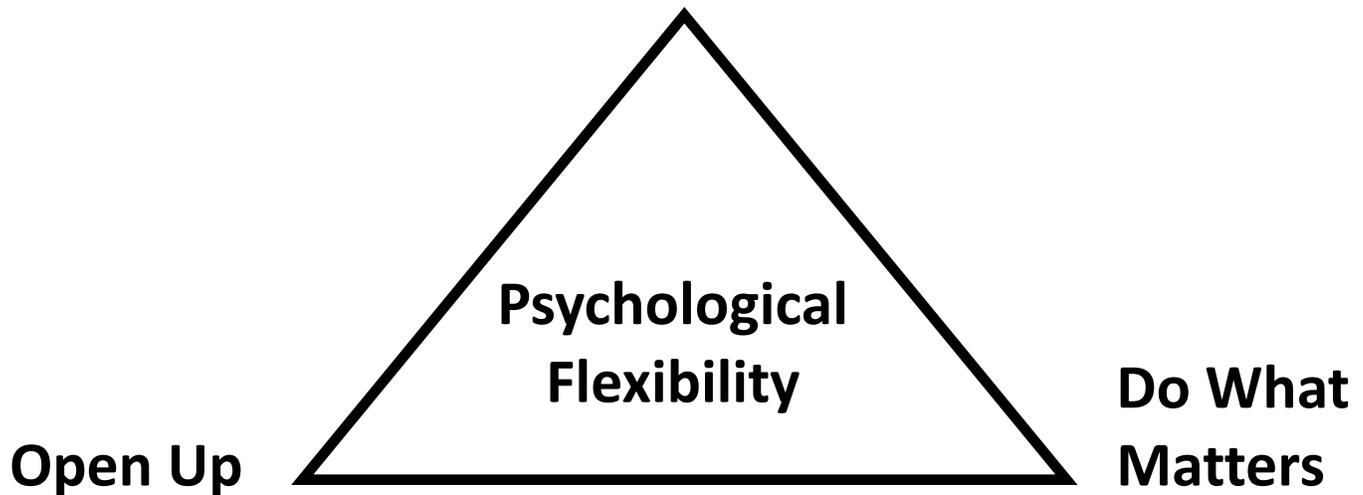
It’s very easy for us to forget what our goals are. So how can we create “reminders”? Can we put messages or alerts in the computer, mobile phone, calendar, or journal? Can we ask people in our support network to remind us? Can we stick up notes on the mirror or the fridge or the car dashboard? Can we put a sticker on our watch strap, or an elastic band around our wrist, or a gadget on our key ring, so that whenever we see these things they remind us of our goals?

Can we use a recurring event to cue our new behavior: for example, we might do a breathing exercise for ten minutes immediately after dinner, or as soon as our alarm clock goes off in the morning? Can we schedule the activity into a calendar or diary or onto our daily “To Do” list – and highlight it in some way, to emphasize its importance? (This of course also gives the goal a time-frame, and helps avoid competing activities.)

The 'Triflex' Psychological Flexibility Assessment Tool

Throughout 'Getting Unstuck In ACT', I refer to the 'triflex' rather than the 'hexaflex'. The worksheet on the following page is designed to take advantage of the simpler triflex conceptualisation. You can see it asks you to assess the client on a scale of 0 to 10 for each of the three corners of the triflex: Being present (contacting the present moment & self-as-context), Opening up (defusion & acceptance), and Doing what matters (values and committed action). The main idea is for ACT coaches and therapists to use it as an assessment tool: a) to track the client's progress from session to session, and b) to help choose what to work on with the client in the next session. Of course, the therapist can also share the assessment with the client, if desired.

Be Present



Opening Up

Able to separate, unhook, detach from thoughts and feelings?

Able to open up & make room for thoughts and feelings, and allow them to freely flow?

Being Present

Able to engage fully in here-and-now experience? Ability for task-focused attention?

Aware of own thoughts and feelings? Able to empathise? Able to take perspective on self and self-story?

Doing What Matters

Able to be clear about & connected with values?

Able to take and sustain values-guided action?

Able to set goals? Sufficient skills to achieve goals?

Today's Scores, 0-10: 0 = low strength and 10 = high strength

Opening up:

Being present:

Doing what matters:

BRAINSTORM: What core areas could you target in the next session? What might you do in the next session: consider questions you might ask, tools, techniques, strategies, metaphors, worksheets, experiential exercises, goal-setting, skills practice?