

STARTING SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT

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For many, taking action related to a significant change in life seems daunting. If you find yourself hesitating, procrastinating, rationalizing or being impulsive, consider whether or not the situation or opportunity is truly valuable for you. To judge that you'll probably find that at least some aspects below are present. Your new focus:

- is worthwhile or promising
- reflects a strong need or desire
- prompts sustained curiosity
- has a positive association with past experience
- connects you with people who are trustworthy, valuable and interesting
- stimulates positive emotions such as excitement or hope
- promises to relieve anxiety or fear

On the other hand, below are aspects that contribute to avoidance. Unfortunately, these points can exist concurrently with those above, weakening your motivation to move forward.

- associations with past negative experience
- fear of the unknown
- sense of vulnerability
- people who intimidate or bore you
- expected work required
- lack of confidence about needed abilities to follow through
- tendency to avoid asking for assistance
- time anticipated
- discomfort with addressing long-standing, often repetitive, personal and professional issues

Following are ways to move forward when you decide a new activity, project, approach to life or opportunity is worthwhile or promising.

Name negative emotions, associations or thoughts you have about following through. Keep your list of these negatives to no more than four to six matters to avoid overwhelming yourself. If you have more, stick to this suggested number by mentioning only the most significant. Put them in priority order of their power in limiting your progress. Briefly note for each one:

- how relevant it is your anticipated change
- what you can do to make it less intrusive
- who can and will assist you

Name positive emotions, associations or thoughts you have about following through. Make as long a list of these positives as you wish. Jot down how you can strengthen each point. Then put them in priority order of their power to promote your progress. Finally, place your lists of negatives and positives side by side to see how the positives can offset, eliminate or weaken the negatives.

As you find yourself avoiding action, use the bullet points immediately above and the list of positives you just created. Together, they will help you identify what you can do to transcend what's getting in your way.

For even modest progress, acknowledge and reward yourself. Describe briefly below about five such incentives that will motivate and mean something to you.

Reality strikes! But let's face it. Fear and anxiety --- and sometimes laziness --- are powerful inhibitors that may be behind your avoidance. You may also think you have no time for anything else in your life. Then, a purely rational approach may not move you forward.

Negative emotions may even be habitual or ingrained blocks. And doing something different requires effort, learning and commitment --- as well as adequate sleep to allow new information, processes and knowledge to lodge in your brain.

No matter how accomplished you are and worthwhile the focus, struggling to learn something important and new, starting a different path or even changing patterns and routines is challenging. In fact, the more used you are to being a quick study, the more thwarted you may feel when you don't pick up new matters easily or shift your habits. That sense can be a blow to the ego, but also signal a chance to stretch and grow, as well as to have a better life.

When you give up --- even before you start --- that's understandable. But if you want to make progress, give yourself permission to address briefly what's holding you back. Then do one manageable thing within 24 hours that will help you move forward.

Just don't give up entirely. The longer you avoid action, the more difficult it is to start again. Instead, return in a day or two to try again. And then in another few days. Maybe your unconscious will have done some preparatory work to get you started.

Practical steps you can take to move forward. Skim the list below and choose the top three options that will be the most helpful. Adapt your choices to what will work for you.

- **A little bit.** Just start with 20-30 minutes daily on a new or complex activity. Your brain can only absorb so much. Preferably get deep sleep between learning sessions to allow for assimilation. According to James Maas, Cornell University professor of psychology, sleep "transports memories in the form of

neural patterns to the hippocampus area of the brain and resupplies the system with neurotransmitters used up during the previous day.”

- **Research.** Explore basic aspects of what you don't know to bolster your confidence and provide a foundation for understanding.
- **Exercise.** Feed your brain with oxygen by doing about 15 minutes of vigorous exercise that's appropriate for you before acting.
- **Expectations.** Have reasonable expectations about what you can do and accomplish. Favor small steps over great leaps forward, which are not typical anyway.
- **Reinforcement.** To contribute to memory consolidation, keep building on what you're learning and doing in consistent, regular ways. They include reviews such as telling someone else what you've learned or done, helping another learn or understand it, writing down in outline form what you're doing and re-considering your process and goals periodically.
- **Feedback.** Get specific feedback from others on your new understanding and progress. Ask for comments that are positive *and* help you refine what you're learning and doing from people who know about your focus.
- **Assistance.** Choose and reach out to one or two people you respect and trust who can and will help you. Be specific about what you want and offer something relevant to them, as appropriate.
- **Stress.** Limit as much as possible bad stress such as pressures, negative self-talk, over focus on outcomes and undue expectations. Such stress contributes to fuzzy thinking, giving yourself the impression that you're not getting it. (Good stress occurs with the challenge of doing something new, worthwhile or stimulating.)
- **Applications.** Find meaningful ways to apply what you're learning or doing so you can see and come to enjoy the benefits.
- **Strengths.** Identify how you can use your established strengths to make progress.
- **Honesty.** Be honest with yourself about whether or not you truly want to do that “something new or different.” Are you pressuring yourself inappropriately or unduly? In other words, what should you let go of or modify about your particular goal?
- **Humor.** If you find yourself repeating self-destructive or limiting thoughts and habits, gently say something like: “Oh, there I go again. This doesn't help. What can I do now to further my interests?”

Next steps:

Jot down below, one action you will take to serve your top priorities and best interests within the next 24 hours. Mention who will help you ensure that you'll do it and request their assistance.

Then, identify your next step and block time on your calendar to do it.... And so on.

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