

Feeling Stuck- 1: Small Steps

By Brooke Loening

Sometimes we do feel stuck or even paralyzed when we know we need to deal with something in our life. Why do we get road blocked from doing the things we know we need to do? Maybe because the idea of change seems too big to even consider; like leaping a tall building in a “single bound”. It may be overwhelming and subconsciously it can even result in some level of panic, so we tend to avoid it all together.

Physiologically, the mid brain perceives any change as being a potential threat to our existence and might trigger a fight or flight response. The bigger the change, the more likely our brain will perceive a threat. The cortex part of the brain is where we create and make changes in our lives and we need the cortex to be in full operation in order to take important steps toward changing our lives. The problem is that if we are in panic mode, access to the cortex is temporarily shut down by the mid brain and we reside in a mode of survival only, making creative actions almost impossible. Therefore, any change we decide to make must be small enough to pass the mid-brain threat test in order to make it to the cortex, where creative action thoughts originate.

Set your goal so that you have the greatest chance of success. When we are dealing with the idea of making a change, the first step is to break the challenge down into its smaller parts. There may be several factors that need to be addressed, but the reality is that there is only one exact next step that could be taken as a starting point. This next step needs to be small and doable in order to make it work for you and your creative brain.

One client of mine had a to do list which was 200 items long. I asked her what kind of progress she was making on this list over the last 2 months and she responded that she had been unable to do anything because it felt so overwhelming to even look at this humungous list. I asked her to pick three tasks out this list, and make this her new to do list. The rest would be “on file”. Then I asked her to choose one of those items and tell me what the exact next step was that she needed to take in order to move it forward. It turned out that the screen on her cell phone was cracked and she needed a new one.

Her exact next step was not to purchase a new cell phone. When she really broke it down into its smaller parts, her next step was to call her friends who lived nearby to find out which service they used and what plan they were on, as she never got great service in her area with her provider. So we agreed that she would make three calls within the next week, and at that time she would be clear on her next step with the phone purchase. Subconsciously, she knew inside that this could be a multiple-step job, and that is one reason it never got done. Overall, this small plan of action was not threatening compared to 200 items, many of which required numerous steps.

Reducing her entire life's to do list to one action made it non-threatening and more realistic. Now it was actually doable. The next time you are feeling stuck, break your challenge down into the critical parts and identify the “exact next step”. Make it small and totally manageable, and make a commitment to take that step within a week's time. Once you take that step, you start to build of a feeling of “I can do this,” and you are on your way!

Brooke Loening is a life coach in Sharon who works with individuals, and runs weekly coaching groups on achieving growth in career, health and relationships. For more information and previous columns visit theloeningplan.com. Columns can also be found at tcextra.com