COMMITTED ACTION – DOING WHAT MATTERS

“The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step ...” – Lao Tzu

Committed action is action that is mindful, effective and guided by our values. We can break this process down into a set of simple steps:

- Choose a domain of life that is a high priority for change (e.g. work, relationships, health)
- Set goals based on your values,
- Identify barriers that might get in the way,
- Take mindful, determined action,
- Reflect on what worked and what didn’t work, then consider setting another goal.
- If you “get stuck” or “drift off course”, as soon as you realize it, commit to getting back on track again.

The “Goal-Setting Worksheet” can be a useful resource as you learn the process of committed action.

If you find yourself setting goals and then not achieving them, remember that everybody breaks commitments. It’s human. Committed action is not about perfectionism - the idea is to practice getting better at keeping our commitments, remembering that there are two basic patterns of commitment:

1. The ‘Stuck’ pattern: make commitment, break commitment ... give up.
2. The ‘Vitality’ pattern: make commitment, break commitment ... lick your wounds (practice mindfulness skills), learn from the experience, pick yourself up, get back on course and make another commitment.

When we don’t achieve a goal, usually one or more of the following barriers are in the way (the “FEAR” acronym):

F–Fusion: you’re caught up in thoughts that get in the way (e.g. “I’m too busy”, “It’s too hard”, etc.)

E–Excessive goals: the goals you’ve chosen are unrealistic

A–Avoidance of discomfort: making changes in life always provokes some anxiety and discomfort

R–Remoteness from values: you aren’t really connected with the underlying values

The ANTIDOTE to these “FEAR” factors is “DARE”:

D–Defusion: identify unhelpful thoughts and “defuse” from them so they don’t hold you back

A–Acceptance of discomfort: breathe into and make room for the painful feelings

R–Realistic goals: adjust your goal, or break it down into smaller steps, so that it is S.M.A.R.T (see over)

E–Embracing your values: reflect on if & why this goal truly matters to you

References: - ‘The Happiness Trap’ and ‘ACT Made Simple’, by Dr Russ Harris MD
Goal Setting Worksheet

A key focus in ACT is setting our goals guided by our values. Therefore, Step 1, before any goal-setting, is to clarify what value(s) is(are) underlying your goals.

Step 1: My value(s) underlying these goals are:

When it comes to setting goals, make sure you set a SMART goal. SMART stands for:

Specific: specify the actions you will take, when and where you will do so, and who or what is involved. Example of a vague or non-specific goal: “I will spend more time with my kids.” A specific goal: “I will take the kids to the park on Saturday to play baseball.” A non-specific goal: “I will be more loving towards my wife.” A specific goal: “I will call my wife at lunchtime and tell her I love her.”

Meaningful: The goal should be personally meaningful to you. If it is genuinely guided by your values, as opposed to following a rigid rule, or trying to please others, or trying to avoid some pain, then it will be meaningful. If it lacks a sense of meaning or purpose, check in and see if it is really guided by your values.

Adaptive: Does the goal help you to take your life forwards in a direction that, as far as you can predict, is likely to improve the quality of that life?

Realistic: The goal should be realistically achievable. Take into account your health, competing demands on your time, financial status, and whether you have the skills to achieve it.

Time-bound: to increase the specificity of your goal, set a day, date and time for it. If this is not possible, set as accurate a time limit as you can.

Step 2 is to write down a graduated series of goals, starting from tiny simple goals that can be achieved right away, to long term goals that may not be achieved for months or years.

Step 2: Some of my goals are:

Immediate Goal(s) (something small, simple, easy, I can do in the next 24 hours)

Short Term Goal(s) (things I can do over the next few days and weeks)

Medium Term Goal(s) (things I can do over the next few weeks and months)

Long Term Goal(s) (things I can do over the next few months and years)

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