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The Complete Set of Client Handouts and Worksheets from ACT books by Russ Harris

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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?*

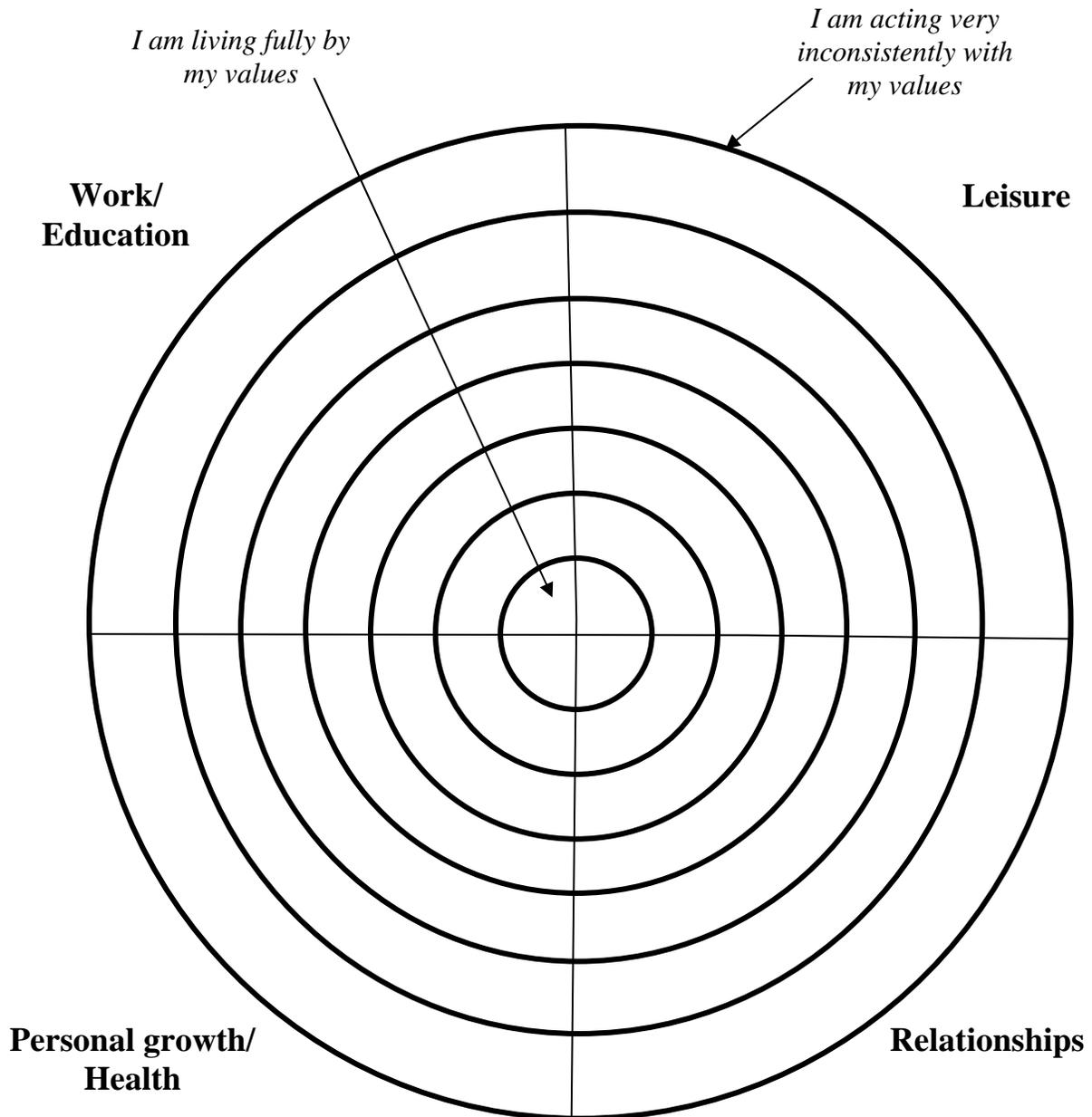
1. Work/Education: includes workplace, career, education, skills development, etc.

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.



Dissecting The Problem

This form is to help gather information about the nature of the main challenge, issue, or problem facing you. First, please summarize, in 1 or 2 sentences, what the main issue or problem is:

Second, please describe, in 1 or 2 sentences, how it affects your life, and what it stops you from doing or being:

Regardless of what your problem is – whether it is a physical illness, a difficult relationship, a work situation, a financial crisis, a performance issue, the loss of a loved one, a severe injury, or a clinical disorder such as depression - when we dissect the problem, we usually find four major elements that contribute significantly to the issue. These are represented in the boxes below. Please write as much as you can in each box, about the thoughts, feelings and actions that contribute to or worsen the challenge, problem or issue facing you.

<p>Entanglement With Thoughts What memories, worries, fears, self-criticisms, or other unhelpful thoughts do you dwell on, or get “caught up” in, related to this issue? What thoughts do you allow to hold you back or push you around or bring you down?</p>	<p>Life-draining Actions: What are you currently doing that makes your life worse in the long term: keeps you stuck; wastes your time or money; drains your energy; restricts your life, impacts negatively on your health, work or relationships; maintains or worsens the problems you are dealing with?</p>
<p>Struggle With Feelings What emotions, feelings, urges, impulses, or sensations (associated with this issue) do you fight with, avoid, suppress, try to get rid of, or otherwise struggle with?</p>	<p>Avoiding Challenging Situations: What situations, activities, people or places are you avoiding or staying away from? What have you quit, withdrawn from, dropped out of? What do you keep “putting off” until later?</p>

The Life Compass

In the main part of each large box, write a few key words about what is important or meaningful to you in this domain of life: What sort of person do you want to be? What sort of personal strengths and qualities do you want to cultivate? What you want to stand for? What do you want to do? How do you ideally want to behave? (If a box seems irrelevant to you, that's okay: just leave it blank. If you get stuck on a box, then skip it, and come back to it later. And it's okay if the same words appear in several or all boxes: this helps you identify core values that cut through many domains of life.)

Once you've done that for all boxes, go through them and in the upper small square inside each box, mark on a scale of 0-10 how important these values are to you, at this point in your life: 0= no importance, 10= extremely important. (It's okay if several squares all have the same score.)

Finally, in the lower small square inside each box, mark on a scale of 0-10 how effectively you are living by these values right now. 0= not at all 10= living by them fully (Again, it's okay if several squares all have the same score.)

Finally have a good look at what you've written. What does this tell you about: a) What is important in your life? b) What you are currently neglecting?

Parenting	Personal Growth	Leisure	Spirituality
Health	Work	Community & Environment	
Family Relationships	Intimate Relationships	Social Relationships	

The Problems and Values Worksheet

Acceptance & Commitment Therapy aims to reduce suffering and enrich life, as shown in the diagram below. To help in this process, there are four lots of information that are particularly important. These are represented in the four columns below. Between now and the next session, see what you can write in or add to each column.

STRUGGLE & SUFFERING		RICH & MEANINGFUL LIFE	
<p>Problematic Thoughts And Feelings: What memories, worries, fears, self-criticisms, or other thoughts do you get “caught up” in? What emotions, feelings, urges, or sensations do you struggle with?</p>	<p>Problematic Actions: What are you doing that makes your life worse in the long run: that keeps you stuck; wastes your time or money; drains your energy; impacts negatively on your health or your relationships; or leads to you “missing out” on life?</p>	<p>Values: What matters to you in the “big picture”? What do you want to stand for? What personal qualities and strengths do you want to develop? How do you want to enrich or improve your relationships? How would you like to “grow” or develop, through addressing your issue(s) or problem(s)?</p>	<p>Goals & Actions: What are you currently doing that improves your life in the long run? What do you want to start or do more of? What life-enriching goals do you want to achieve? What life-enhancing actions do you want to take? What life-improving skills would you like to develop?</p>

VITALITY VS. SUFFERING DIARY

Between now and next session, keep a record of what you do when painful thoughts and feelings arise, and notice if these actions lead to increased vitality or increased suffering

Painful Thoughts/ Feelings/ Urges/ Sensations/ Memories that showed up today	Things I did - when those thoughts and feelings showed up - that lead to <u>VITALITY</u> (i.e. enriched my life, or improved my health, wellbeing, or relationships in the long term)	Things I did - when those thoughts and feelings showed up - that lead to <u>SUFFERING</u> (i.e. restricted or worsened my life, drained my health and wellbeing, or hurt my relationships in the long term)

JOIN THE DOTS

What are the main thoughts and feelings showing up in your life today, that are problematic for you? Write these down below under “Body” and “Mind”. Next write down everything you have ever tried to get rid of, avoid, suppress, escape or distract yourself from these thoughts or feelings. Finally consider the long term outcomes.

Body

Feelings, sensations, urges,
cravings, symptoms of physical illness

Mind

Thoughts, memories, beliefs,
worries, self-judgments

D - Distraction: how have you tried to distract yourself from these thoughts and feelings (eg TV, shopping, etc)?

O - Opting out: we often opt out (quit, avoid, or withdraw from) people, places, activities, and situations when we don't like the thoughts and feelings they bring up for us. What are some of the things you opt out of?

T -Thinking: how have you tried to think your way out of it? (e.g. blaming others, worrying, rehashing the past, fantasizing, positive thinking, problem-solving, planning, self-criticism, ‘What if?’, ‘If only ...’, ‘Why me?’, ‘Not fair!’, analyzing, trying to make sense of it, debating with yourself, denial, beating yourself up, etc.)

S – Substances, Self-harm, other Strategies: What substances have you tried putting into your body (including food and prescription medication)? Have you ever tried self-harming activities, such as suicide attempts or reckless risk-taking? Any other strategies you can think of, e.g. excessive sleeping?

Did these strategies get rid of your painful thoughts and feelings *in the long term* – so that they never came back?

When you have used these strategies excessively, rigidly, or inappropriately, what have they cost you in terms of health, vitality, energy, relationships, work, leisure, money, missed opportunities, wasted time?

Getting Hooked

In ACT, we talk colloquially of being “hooked by your mind” or “hooked by thoughts” – by which we mean you get all caught up in your thoughts and they exert a strong influence over your actions. In what situations does your mind manage to hook you? What sort of things does it say in order to hook you? How do you manage to unhook yourself?

Date/Time Triggering Events or Situation	What did your mind say or do to hook you?	How did your behavior change when you got hooked? What did those actions cost you?	Did you manage to unhook yourself? If so, how?

EXPANSION PRACTICE SHEET

Expansion means opening up and making room for difficult feelings, urges and sensations – thereby allowing them to ‘flow through’ you without a struggle. You don’t have to like or want these feelings – you just make room for them and allow them to be there even though they are unpleasant. Once this skill is learned, if these feelings should resurface, you can rapidly make room for them and let them ‘flow on by’ – so you can invest your time and energy in doing meaningful life-enhancing activities, instead of struggling. Aim to practice at least once a day breathing into and making room for difficult feelings and sensations

Struggling vs. Opening Up

Fill in this worksheet once a day to help keep track of what happens when you struggle with your emotions and what happens when you open up and make room for them.

Struggling vs. Opening Up Worksheet			
Day/Date/Time Feelings/Sensations What events triggered this?	How much did you struggle with these feelings? 0 = no struggle, 10 = maximum struggle. What did you actually do during the struggle?	Did you open up and make room for these feelings, allowing them to be there even though they were unpleasant? If so, how did you do that?	What was the long-term effect of the way you responded to your feelings? Did it enhance life or worsen it?

Simple Ways to Get Present

Take Ten Breaths

This is a simple exercise to center yourself and connect with your environment. Practice it throughout the day, especially any time you find yourself getting caught up in your thoughts and feelings.

1. Take ten slow, deep breaths. Focus on breathing out as slowly as possible until the lungs are completely empty—and then allow them to refill by themselves.
2. Notice the sensations of your lungs emptying. Notice them refilling. Notice your rib cage rising and falling. Notice the gentle rise and fall of your shoulders.
3. See if you can let your thoughts come and go as if they're just passing cars, driving past outside your house.
4. Expand your awareness: simultaneously notice your breathing and your body. Then look around the room and notice what you can see, hear, smell, touch, and feel.

Drop Anchor

This is another simple exercise to center yourself and connect with the world around you. Practice it throughout the day, especially any time you find yourself getting caught up in your thoughts and feelings.

1. Plant your feet into the floor.
2. Push them down—notice the floor beneath you, supporting you.
3. Notice the muscle tension in your legs as you push your feet down.
4. Notice your entire body—and the feeling of gravity flowing down through your head, spine, and legs into your feet.
5. Now look around and notice what you can see and hear around you. Notice where you are and what you're doing.

Notice Five Things

This is yet another simple exercise to center yourself and engage with your environment. Practice it throughout the day, especially any time you find yourself getting caught up in your thoughts and feelings.

1. Pause for a moment
2. Look around and notice five things that you can see.
3. Listen carefully and notice five things that you can hear.
4. Notice five things that you can feel in contact with your body (for example, your watch against your wrist, your trousers against your legs, the air on your face, your feet upon the floor, your back against the chair).
5. Finally, do all of the above simultaneously

Informal Mindfulness Practice

1. Mindfulness in Your Morning Routine

Pick an activity that constitutes part of your daily morning routine, such as brushing your teeth, shaving, making the bed, or taking a shower. When you do it, totally focus attention on what you're doing: the body movements, the taste, the touch, the smell, the sight, the sound, and so on. Notice what's happening with an attitude of openness and curiosity.

For example, when you're in the shower, notice the sounds of the water as it sprays out of the nozzle, as it hits your body, and as it gurgles down the drain. Notice the temperature of the water, and the feel of it in your hair, and on your shoulders, and running down your legs. Notice the smell of the soap and shampoo, and the feel of them against your skin. Notice the sight of the water droplets on the walls or shower curtain, the water dripping down your body and the steam rising upward. Notice the movements of your arms as you wash or scrub or shampoo.

When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, and let them come and go like passing cars. Again and again, you'll get caught up in your thoughts. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what the thought was that distracted you, and bring your attention back to the shower.

2. Mindfulness of Domestic Chores

Pick an activity such as ironing clothes, washing dishes, vacuuming floors—something mundane that you have to do to make your life work—and do it mindfully. For example, when ironing clothes, notice the color and shape of the clothing, and the pattern made by the creases, and the new pattern as the creases disappear. Notice the hiss of the steam, the creak of the ironing board, the faint sound of the iron moving over the material. Notice the grip of your hand on the iron, and the movement of your arm and your shoulder.

If boredom or frustration arises, simply acknowledge it, and bring your attention back to the task at hand. When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, let them be, and bring your attention back to what you're doing. Again and again, your attention will wander. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what distracted you, and bring your attention back to your current activity.

3. Mindfulness of Pleasant Activities

Pick an activity you enjoy such as cuddling with a loved one, eating lunch, stroking the cat, playing with the dog, walking in the park, listening to music, having a soothing hot bath, and so on. Do this activity mindfully: engage in it fully, using all five of your senses, and savor every moment. If and when your attention wanders, as soon as you realize it, note what distracted you, and re-engage in whatever you're doing.

Overcoming F.E.A.R. - 1

Let's assume you have clarified your values, and set yourself a goal – but you haven't followed through on it. What stopped you? The F.E.A.R. acronym covers most of the common barriers:

F = Fusion (stuff your mind tells you that gets in the way when you get caught up in it)

E = Excessive goals (your goal is too big, or you lack the skills, time, money, health, or other resources)

A = Avoidance of discomfort (unwillingness to make room for the discomfort this challenge brings)

R = Remoteness from values (losing touch with - or forgetting - what is important or meaningful about this)

So now, in as few words as possible, write down everything that has stopped you following through:

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

6)

7)

8)

Now go back, and label each answer with one or two of the letters F, E, A, or R – whichever best describe this barrier. In other words, was it F = Fusion with a story (e.g. I'll fail; it's too hard; I'll do it later; I'm too weak; I can't do it); was it E = Excessive goal (you lacked the time, money, health, facilities, skills, or support necessary; or it was just too big and you got overwhelmed); was it A = Avoidance of discomfort (you were unwilling to make room for the anxiety, frustration, fear of failure, or other uncomfortable thoughts and feelings); or was it R = remoteness from your values (you forgot or lost touch with the values underlying this goal)?

The antidote to F.E.A.R. is D.A.R.E.

D = Defusion

A = Acceptance of discomfort

R = Realistic goals

E = Embracing values

Go through your barriers, one by one, and work out how you can deal with them, using D.A.R.E. Below, you'll find some suggestions to help you.

Overcoming F.E.A.R. – 2

Defusion strategies: name the story, thank your mind, acknowledge ‘Here’s reason-giving’ or ‘Here’s judging’, name the demon/monster/passenger, recognize this is Radio Doom & Gloom broadcasting, or simply let the thoughts come and go like passing cars.

Acceptance strategies: name the feeling, observe it like a curious scientist, rate it on a scale of 1 to 10, commit to allowing it, breathe into it, make room for it, give it a shape and color.

Realistic goal-setting: if you lack skills, set new goals around learning them; if your goal is too big, break it down into small chunks; if you lack resources, brainstorm how you can get them; if you lack time, what are you willing to give up in order to make time?; if the goal is truly impossible, e.g. due to health or financial issues, or external barriers over which you have no direct influence, then set a different one.

Embracing values: connect with what matters to you about this goal. Is it truly meaningful? Is it aligned with your values? Is it truly important? Is it moving your life forward in the direction you wish to go?

Using these ideas (and others of your own, or of your therapist/coach), write down how you can respond to the barriers you listed above.

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

6)

7)

8)

Finally, ask yourself this question: am I willing to make room for the difficult thoughts and feelings that show up, without getting caught up in them or struggling with them, and take effective action, in order to do what matters, deep in my heart?

If so: go ahead and give it a go.

If not, consider these three questions:

- a) Does this really and truly matter to you?
- b) If it does, then what is the cost to you of avoiding it or putting it off?
- c) Would you rather have the vitality-draining pain of staying stuck, or the life-enhancing pain of moving forward?

- Here are some personal qualities and character strengths I will develop and demonstrate to others:

- Here are some ways I will behave differently in close relationships with friends and family:

- Here are some ways I will behave differently in relationships involving work, education, sport or leisure:

- Here are some important things I will ‘stand for’:

- Here are some activities I will start or do more of:

- Here are some goals I will work towards:

- Here are some actions I will take to improve my life:

A Quick Look at Your Values – page 1

Values are your heart's deepest desires for how you want to behave as a human being. Values are not about what you want to get or achieve; they are about how you want to behave or act on an ongoing basis.

There are literally hundreds of different values, but below you'll find a list of the most common ones. Probably, not all of them will be relevant to you. Keep in mind there are no such things as 'right values' or 'wrong values'. It's a bit like our taste in pizzas. If you prefer ham and pineapple but I prefer salami and olives, that doesn't mean that my taste in pizzas is *right* and yours is *wrong*. It just means we have different tastes. And similarly, we may have different values. So read through the list below and write a letter next to each value: V = Very important, Q = Quite important, and N = Not so important; and make sure to score *at least ten* of them as Very important.

1. Acceptance: to be open to and accepting of myself, others, life etc
2. Adventure: to be adventurous; to actively seek, create, or 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, real; to be true to myself
5. Beauty: to appreciate, create, nurture or cultivate beauty in myself, others, the environment etc
6. Caring: to be caring towards myself, others, the environment etc
7. Challenge: to keep challenging myself to grow, learn, improve
8. Compassion: to act with kindness towards those who are suffering
9. Connection: to engage fully in whatever I am doing, and be fully present with others
10. Contribution: to contribute, help, assist, or make a positive difference to myself or others
11. Conformity: to be respectful and obedient of rules and obligations
12. Cooperation: to be cooperative and collaborative with others
13. Courage: to be courageous or brave; to persist in the face of fear, threat, or difficulty
14. Creativity: to be creative or innovative
15. Curiosity: to be curious, open-minded and interested; to explore and discover
16. Encouragement: to encourage and reward behaviour that I value in myself or others
17. Equality: to treat others as equal to myself, and vice-versa
18. Excitement: to seek, create and engage in activities that are exciting, stimulating or thrilling
19. Fairness: to be fair to myself or others
20. Fitness: to maintain or improve my fitness; to look after my physical and mental health and wellbeing
21. Flexibility: to adjust and adapt readily to changing circumstances
22. Freedom: to live freely; to choose how I live and behave, or help others do likewise
23. Friendliness: to be friendly, companionable, or agreeable towards others
24. Forgiveness: to be forgiving towards myself or others
25. Fun: to be fun-loving; to seek, create, and engage in fun-filled activities
26. Generosity: to be generous, sharing and giving, to myself or others
27. Gratitude: to be grateful for and appreciative of the positive aspects of myself, others and life
28. Honesty: to be honest, truthful, and sincere with myself and others
29. Humour: to see and appreciate the humorous side of life
30. Humility: to be humble or modest; to let my achievements speak for themselves

A Quick Look at Your Values – page 2

31. Industry: to be industrious, hard-working, dedicated
32. Independence: to be self-supportive, and choose my own way of doing things
33. Intimacy: to open up, reveal, and share myself -- emotionally or physically – in my close personal relationships
34. Justice: to uphold justice and fairness
35. Kindness: to be kind, compassionate, considerate, nurturing or caring towards myself or others
36. Love: to act lovingly or affectionately towards myself or others
37. Mindfulness: to be conscious of, open to, and curious about my here-and-now experience
38. Order: to be orderly and organized
39. Open-mindedness: to think things through, see things from other's points of view, and weigh evidence fairly.
40. Patience: to wait calmly for what I want
41. Persistence: to continue resolutely, despite problems or difficulties.
42. Pleasure: to create and give pleasure to myself or others
43. Power: to strongly influence or wield authority over others, e.g. taking charge, leading, organizing
44. Reciprocity: to build relationships in which there is a fair balance of giving and taking
45. Respect: to be respectful towards myself or others; to be polite, considerate and show positive regard
46. Responsibility: to be responsible and accountable for my actions
47. Romance: to be romantic; to display and express love or strong affection
48. Safety: to secure, protect, or ensure safety of myself or others
49. Self-awareness: to be aware of my own thoughts, feelings and actions
50. Self-care: to look after my health and wellbeing, and get my needs met
51. Self-development: to keep growing, advancing or improving in knowledge, skills, character, or life experience.
52. Self-control: to act in accordance with my own ideals
53. Sensuality: to create, explore and enjoy experiences that stimulate the five senses
54. Sexuality: to explore or express my sexuality
55. Spirituality: to connect with things bigger than myself
56. Skilfulness: to continually practice and improve my skills, and apply myself fully when using them
57. Supportiveness: to be supportive, helpful, encouraging, and available to myself or others
58. Trust: to be trustworthy; to be loyal, faithful, sincere, and reliable
59. Insert your own unlisted value here:
60. Insert your own unlisted value here:

Once you've marked each value as V, Q, N (Very, Quite, or Not so important), go through all the Vs, and select out the top six that are most important to you. Mark each one with a 6, to show it's in your top six. Finally, write those six values out below, to remind yourself this is what you want to stand for as a human being.

<p>LOVE (deepest, most meaningful relationships – including children, partner, parents, close friends and relatives)</p> <p>My Values:</p> <p>Short Term Goals:</p> <p>Medium Term Goals:</p> <p>Long Term Goals :</p>	<p>WORK (paid work, studying/ education/ apprenticeships, and unpaid work such as volunteering, or domestic duties)</p> <p>My Values:</p> <p>Short Term Goals:</p> <p>Medium Term Goals:</p> <p>Long Term Goals :</p>
<p>PLAY (rest and relaxation, hobbies, creativity, sport, and all forms of leisure, recreation and entertainment)</p> <p>My Values:</p> <p>Short Term Goals:</p> <p>Medium Term Goals:</p> <p>Long Term Goals :</p>	<p>HEALTH (physical, psychological, emotional, or spiritual health and wellbeing.)</p> <p>My Values:</p> <p>Short Term Goals:</p> <p>Medium Term Goals:</p> <p>Long Term Goals :</p>

Worksheets To Use With The Happiness Trap

The worksheets in this compilation are designed to be used in conjunction with The Happiness Trap. If you are working with a coach or therapist, they will probably want you to fill them in and bring them into your sessions.

As a general rule, read the chapter first, and then take a look at the worksheet; it should then be self-explanatory.

Many of these worksheets you will want to use repeatedly for different issues in different areas of your life. I hope you find them helpful.

*All the best,
Russ Harris*

Chapter 1: [Control of Thoughts and Feelings Questionnaire](#)

Chapter 2: a) [Costs of Avoidance Worksheet](#)

Chapter 2: b) [Avoidance and Suffering Diary](#)

Chapter 9: [Defusion Practice Worksheet](#)

Chapter 13: [Expansion Practice Worksheet](#)

Chapter 18: [Informal Mindfulness Practice](#)

Chapter 20: [Mindful Breathing Practice Worksheet](#)

Chapter 25: a) [The Life Values Questionnaire](#)

Chapter 25: b) [Detailed Bull's Eye Worksheet](#)

Chapter 25: c) [Brief Bull's Eye Worksheet](#)

Chapter 27: [Goal Setting Worksheet](#)

Chapter 30: [Overcoming F.E.A.R. Worksheet](#)

Chapter 31: [The Willingness and Action Plan](#)

Appendix: [What To Do In A Crisis](#)

How to Get the Most Out Of 'The Happiness Trap'

Reading the Book

There are two ways to read the book. You can either work through it slowly and steadily, doing the exercises as you go. Or you can read it from cover to cover very rapidly, and then go back and work through it at your leisure. You can also enhance the exercises in the book by using the free online resources at

http://www.thehappinesstrap.com/free_resources

Stuck or Confused?

If you ever get stuck or confused, I'd suggest you join the Yahoo list serve, entitled 'ACT for the Public':

http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/ACT_for_the_Public/join

There's no cost involved. You can post emails to the group if ever you are confused, or concerned, or just bogged down – and you will quickly receive supportive responses from other members of the public and/or from the many therapists (including myself) who are also on the list.

Prioritize Your Health and Wellbeing

If you are a typical reader, then you are already a very busy person. You are juggling multiple demands and rarely have any time left over for yourself. Thus, if you want this book to make a real difference in your life, you will have to put your health and wellbeing above some of the other demands upon your time. Can you schedule in some time for reading? Can you schedule in some time for practicing the exercises? Even 30 minutes a day to read and/or practice can make a huge difference. Are you willing to give up 30 minutes of TV or other time-eating activities?

Practice

Whoever said "Practice makes perfect" was lying. But practice does lead to improvement. Like any new skills, the exercises and strategies in this book do require practice – they do not come naturally, or magically happen simply as a result of reading. And like any new skill, the more you practice it, the easier it becomes and the more naturalistic.

Be Patient

Be patient with yourself. As you work through the book, there are times when you will inevitably screw up, fail, and forget things. This is because you are a human being, not a saint or a guru or a superhero. So please, allow yourself permission to be human. And give yourself as much time as you need to get a good handle on your new skills.

Consider Using a CD or MP3 Recording

The CDs and MP3 recordings available from www.thehappinesstrap.com have been specifically designed for use with this book. They will substantially enhance the benefits of the book for you. Mindfulness skills are much easier to develop initially when you have a voice guiding you.

Repetition

I intended The Happiness Trap to be the sort of book that you read not just once, but again and again. My hope is that after you've been through it once, you repeatedly revisit it. The small chapters make it an ideal book for dipping into.

Working With a Coach or Therapist:

While The Happiness Trap is primarily written as a self-help book for use on your own, it is also a valuable adjunct to therapy and coaching. Indeed the book flows along, chapter by chapter, in much the same way as you might typically work with a coach or therapist. If your therapist or coach has done some training in ACT they will be familiar with many of the exercises and metaphors in the book, but probably not all of them, so it is a good idea if they read the book too.

You can use the book as an adjunct in two main ways:

1. You can read a chapter or two (or three) before each session, then discuss in session how the reading applies to you, and then practice the relevant exercises during the session.
2. You can read relevant chapters after a session, to build on what you have experienced or learned during the session.

Whichever way you do it, the worksheets from the free resources section can be very helpful; use them as you are reading the relevant chapter.

To Find an ACT Therapist

If you want to find an ACT therapist in Australia, [click here](#)

If you want to find an ACT therapist in USA, UK and other countries, [click here](#)

*I hope you enjoy reading it and I trust you'll find it helpful
Cheers, Russ Harris*

Control of Thoughts and Feelings Questionnaire

This questionnaire has been adapted from similar ones developed by Steven Hayes, Frank Bond, and others. For each pair of statements, please circle the one that most accurately fits how you feel. The answer you choose doesn't have to be absolutely 100 percent true for you all the time; just pick the answer which seems to be more representative of your general attitude.

- 1a. I must have good control of my feelings in order to be successful in life.
1b. It is unnecessary for me to control my feelings in order to be successful in life.
- 2a. Anxiety is bad.
2b. Anxiety is neither good nor bad. It is merely an uncomfortable feeling.
- 3a. Negative thoughts and feelings will harm you if you don't control or get rid of them.
3b. Negative thoughts and feelings won't harm you even if they feel unpleasant.
- 4a. I'm afraid of some of my strong feelings.
4b. I'm not afraid of any feelings, no matter how strong.
- 5a. In order for me to do something important, I have to get rid of all my doubts.
5b. I can do something important, even when doubts are present.
- 6a. When negative thoughts and feelings arise, it's important to reduce or get rid of them as quickly as possible.
6b. Trying to reduce or get rid of negative thoughts and feelings frequently causes problems. If I simply allow them to be, then they will change as a natural part of living.
- 7a. The best method of managing negative thoughts and feelings is to analyze them; then utilize that knowledge to get rid of them.
7b. The best method of managing negative thoughts and feelings is to acknowledge their presence and let them be, without having to analyze or judge them.
- 8a. I will become "happy" and "healthy" by improving my ability to avoid, reduce, or get rid of negative thoughts and feelings.
8b. I will become "happy" and "healthy" by allowing negative thoughts and feelings to come and go of their own accord and learning to live effectively when they are present.
- 9a. If I can't suppress or get rid of a negative emotional reaction, it's a sign of personal failure or weakness.
9b. The need to control or get rid of a negative emotional reaction is a problem in itself.
- 10a. Having negative thoughts and feelings is an indication that I'm psychologically unhealthy or I've got problems.
10b. Having negative thoughts and feelings means I'm a normal human being.
- 11a. People who are in control of their lives can generally control how they feel.
11b. People who are in control of their lives do not need to control their feelings.
- 12a. It is not okay to feel anxious and I try hard to avoid it.
12b. I don't like anxiety, but it's okay to feel it.
- 13a. Negative thoughts and feelings are a sign that there is something wrong with my life.
13b. Negative thoughts and feelings are an inevitable part of life for everyone.
- 14a. I have to feel good before I can do something that's important and challenging.
14b. I can do something that's important and challenging even if I'm feeling anxious or depressed.
- 15a. I try to suppress thoughts and feelings that I don't like by just not thinking about them.
15b. I don't try to suppress thoughts and feelings that I don't like. I just let them come and go of their own accord.

To score your test, count the number of times you selected option "a" or "b."

You may like to repeat this test and see how your ideas have changed, after you have finished reading *The Happiness Trap*, or completed several sessions of ACT.

The Costs of Avoidance Worksheet

Complete the following sentences:

The thoughts I'd most like to get rid of are:

The feelings I'd most like to get rid of are:

The sensations I'd most like to get rid of are:

The memories I'd most like to get rid of are:

Next, take a few minutes to write a list of every single thing you've tried in order to avoid or get rid of these unpleasant thoughts or feelings. Try to remember every strategy you have ever used (whether deliberately or by default). Below is a guide to help you:

Distraction: list everything you have ever done to distract yourself from, or 'zone out', or take your mind off these painful thoughts, feelings, sensations or memories.

Opting out: list all the activities, interests, events, people, or places that you have avoided or withdrawn from, and all the opportunities you have missed out on, because you did not feel good or wanted to avoid feeling bad:

Thinking strategies: list all the different ways of thinking you have tried (deliberately or unintentionally) when painful thoughts and feelings started showing up. Tick any of the following that you have done, and write in any others:

- Worrying
- Dwelling on the past
- Fantasizing about the future
- Imagining escape scenarios (eg leaving your job or your partner)
- Imagining revenge scenarios
- Imagining suicide scenarios
- Thinking ‘It’s not fair ...’
- Thinking ‘If only’
- Thinking of killing yourself
- Blaming yourself
- Blaming others
- Blaming the world
- Talking logically to yourself
- Talking positively to yourself
- Talking negatively to yourself
- Analyzing yourself (trying to figure out why you are like this)
- Analyzing the situation (trying to figure out why this happened)
- Analyzing others (trying to figure out why they are like this)

Substances: list all the substances you have ever used to try and feel better, including foods, drinks, cigarettes, recreational drugs, and prescription drugs

Anything else: write down anything else you can think of you have ever tried to make yourself feel a bit better, or not so bad, when these painful thoughts and feelings showed up.

Once you’ve done that, go through your list and for each item, ask yourself:

1. Did this get rid of my painful thoughts and feelings *in the long term*?
2. Did it bring me closer to a rich, full, and meaningful life?
3. If the answer to question 2 is “no”, then what did this cost me in terms of time, energy, money, health, relationships, and vitality?

AVOIDANCE & SUFFERING DIARY

Fill this in at least once a day, to increase awareness around the costs of trying to avoid or get rid of painful thoughts and feelings.

Painful Thoughts/ Feelings/ Sensations/ Memories that showed up today	What I did to escape, avoid, get rid of them, or distract myself from them	What that cost me in terms of health, vitality, relationship issues, getting stuck, increasing pain, wasted time/money/energy etc.

Informal Mindfulness Exercises

We're all busy, and many of us don't have time (or are unwilling to make time) to formally practice mindfulness skills. However, we can practice informally throughout the day. Here are a couple of examples:

1) Mindfulness in Your Morning Routine

Pick an activity that constitutes part of your daily morning routine, such as brushing your teeth, shaving, or having a shower. When you do it, totally focus on what you are doing: the body movements, the taste, the touch, the smell, the sight, the sound etc.

For example, when you're in the shower, notice the sounds of the water as it sprays out of the nozzle, and as it hits your body as it gurgles down the hole. Notice the temperature of the water, and the feel of it in your hair, and on your shoulders, and running down our legs. Notice the smell of the soap and shampoo, and the feel of them against your skin. Notice the sight of the water droplets on the walls or shower screen, the water dripping down your body and the steam rising upwards. Notice the movements of your arms as you wash or scrub or shampoo.

When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, let them be, and bring your attention back to the shower.

Again and again, your attention will wander. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what distracted you, and bring your attention back to the shower.

2) Mindfulness of Domestic Chores

Pick a chore that you normally try to rush through, or distract yourself from; or one for which you just 'grit your teeth' and try to 'get through it'. For example: ironing clothes, washing dishes, vacuuming floors, making the kids' lunches. Aim to do this chore as a mindfulness practice.

E.g., when ironing clothes: notice the color and shape of the clothing, and the pattern made by the creases, and the new pattern as the creases disappear. Notice the hiss of the steam, the creak of the ironing board, the faint sound of the iron moving over the material. Notice the grip of your hand on the iron, and the movement of your arm and your shoulder.

If boredom or frustration arises, simply acknowledge it, and bring your attention back to the task at hand.

When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, let them be, and bring your attention back to what you are doing.

Again and again, your attention will wander. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what distracted you, and bring your attention back to your current activity.

Now write down some informal mindfulness exercises for yourself:

During my morning routine, I will practice mindfulness of

During my evening routine, I will practice mindfulness of

During the week, I will practice mindfulness of the following chore (s)

Now write down any other quick 'n' easy informal mindfulness exercises you can think of – e.g. while waiting in queues or at traffic lights you could practice mindfulness of your impatience; or when eating dinner, you could aim to eat the first two mouthfuls mindfully.

At the end of each week, pull this sheet out and see how well you have followed it.

VALUES WORKSHEET (Adapted from Kelly Wilson's Valued Living Questionnaire)

Deep down inside, what is important to you? What do you want your life to stand for? What sort of qualities do you want to cultivate as a person? How do you want to be in your relationships with others? Values are our heart's deepest desires for the way we want to interact with and relate to the world, other people, and ourselves. They are leading principles that can guide us and motivate us as we move through life.

Values are not the same as goals. Values are directions we keep moving in, whereas goals are what we want to achieve along the way. A value is like heading North; a goal is like the river or mountain or valley we aim to cross whilst traveling in that direction. Goals can be achieved or 'crossed off', whereas values are an ongoing process. For example, if you want to be a loving, caring, supportive partner, that is a value – an ongoing process. If you stop being loving, caring and supportive, then you are no longer a loving, caring, supportive partner; you are no longer living by that value. In contrast, if you want to get married, that's a goal - it can be 'crossed off' or achieved. Once you're married, you're married – even if you start treating your partner very badly. If you want a better job, that's a goal. Once you've got it - goal achieved. But if you want to fully apply yourself at work, that's a value – an ongoing process.

The following are areas of life that are valued by some people. Not everyone has the same values, and this is not a test to see whether you have the "correct" values. Think about each area in terms of general life directions, rather than in terms of specific goals. There may be certain areas that you don't value much; you may skip them if you wish. There may be areas that overlap – e.g. if you value hiking in the mountains, that may come under both physical health and recreation. It is also important that you write down what you would value if there were nothing in your way. What's important? What do you care about? And what you would like to work towards?

- 1. Family relations.** What sort of brother/sister, son/daughter, uncle/auntie do you want to be? What personal qualities would you like to bring to those relationships? What sort of relationships would you like to build? How would you interact with others if you were the ideal you in these relationships?
- 2. Marriage/couples/intimate relations.** What sort of partner would you like to be in an intimate relationship? What personal qualities would you like to develop? What sort of relationship would you like to build? How would you interact with your partner if you were the 'ideal you' in this relationship?
- 3. Parenting.** What sort of parent would you like to be? What sort of qualities would you like to have? What sort of relationships would you like to build with your children? How would you behave if you were the 'ideal you'.
- 4. Friendships/social life.** What sort of qualities would you like to bring to your friendships? If you could be the best friend possible, how would you behave towards your friends? What sort of friendships would you like to build?
- 5. Career/employment.** What do you value in your work? What would make it more meaningful? What kind of worker would you like to be? If you were living up to your own ideal standards, what personal qualities would you like to bring to your work? What sort of work relations would you like to build?
- 6. Education/personal growth and development.** What do you value about learning, education, training, or personal growth? What new skills would you like to learn? What knowledge would you like to gain? What further education appeals to you? What sort of student would you like to be? What personal qualities would you like to apply?
- 7. Recreation/fun/leisure.** What sorts of hobbies, sports, or leisure activities do you enjoy? How do you relax and unwind? How do you have fun? What sorts of activities would you like to do?
- 8. Spirituality.** Whatever spirituality means to you is fine. It may be as simple as communing with nature, or as formal as participation in an organised religious group. What is important to you in this area of life?
- 9. Citizenship/ environment/ community life.** How would you like to contribute to your community or environment, e.g. through volunteering, or recycling, or supporting a group/ charity/ political party? What sort of environments would you like to create at home, and at work? What environments would you like to spend more time in?
- 10. Health/physical well-being.** What are your values related to maintaining your physical well-being? How do you want to look after your health, with regard to sleep, diet, exercise, smoking, alcohol, etc? Why is this important?

Values Assessment Rating Form

Read through the accompanying values sheet. For each of the ten domains, write a few words to summarise your valued direction, Eg 'To be a loving, supportive, caring, partner.' Rate how important this value is to you on a scale of 0 (low importance) to 10 (high importance). It's okay to have several values scoring the same number. Rate how successfully you have lived this value during the past month on a scale of 0 (not at all successfully) to 10 (very successfully). Finally rank these valued directions in order of the importance you place on working on them right now, with 10 as the highest rank, and 9 the next highest, and so on.

Domain	Valued direction (Write a <u>brief</u> summary, in one or two sentences, or a few key words.)	Importance	Success	Rank
Couples/ intimate relationships				
Parenting				
Family relations				
Social relations				
Employment				
Education and training				
Recreation				
Spirituality				
Citizenship/ community				
Health/ Physical well-being`				

CLARIFYING YOUR VALUES (Adapted From Tobias Lundgren's Bull's Eye Worksheet)

Deep down inside, what is important to you? What do you want your life to stand for? What sort of qualities do you want to cultivate as a person? How do you want to be in your relationships with others? Values are our heart's deepest desires for the way we want to interact with and relate to the world, other people, and ourselves. They are leading principles that can guide us and motivate us as we move through life. Values reflect *what* you want to do, and *how* you want to do it. They are about how you want to behave towards your friends, your family, yourself, your environment, your work, etc.

Values are not the same as goals. Values involve ongoing action; they are like directions we keep moving in, whereas goals are what we want to achieve along the way. A value is like heading West; a goal is like the river or mountain or valley we aim to cross whilst traveling in that direction. Goals can be achieved or 'crossed off', whereas values are ongoing. (No matter how far West you go, you never reach it!) For example, if you want to be a loving, caring, supportive partner, that is a value: it involves ongoing action. In contrast, if you want to get married, that's a goal - it can be 'crossed off' or achieved. If you want a better job, that's a goal. Once you've got it - goal achieved. But if you want to fully apply yourself at work, contribute your best, and engage fully in what you're doing, that's a value: it involves ongoing action.

THE BULL'S EYE

The 'Bull's Eye' is a values-clarification exercise designed by a Swedish ACT therapist called Tobias Lundgren. (I have rewritten it.) The dartboard on the next page is divided into four important domains of life: work/education, leisure, relationships and personal growth/health. To begin with, please write down your values in these 4 areas of life. Not everyone has the same values, and this is not a test to see whether you have the "correct" ones. Think in terms of general life directions, rather than in terms of specific goals. There may be values that overlap – e.g. if you value studying psychology, that may come under both Education and Personal Growth. Write down what you would value if there were nothing in your way, nothing stopping you. What's important? What do you care about? And what you would like to work towards? Your value should not be a specific goal but instead reflect a way you would like to live your life over time. For example, to accompany your son to a football game might be a goal; to be an involved and interested parent might be the underlying value. **Note!** Make sure they are *your* values, not anyone else's. It is *your* personal values that are important!

1. Work/Education: refers to your workplace & career, education and knowledge, skills development. (This may include volunteering and other forms of unpaid work). How do you want to be towards your clients, customers, colleagues, employees, fellow workers? What personal qualities do you want to bring to your work? What skills do you want to develop?

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2. Relationships: refers to intimacy, closeness, friendship and bonding in your life: it includes relationships with your partner, children, parents, relatives, friends, co-workers, and other social contacts. What sort of relationships do you want to build? How do you want to be in these relationships? What personal qualities do you want to develop?

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3. Personal Growth/Health: refers to your ongoing development as a human being. This may include include organized religion, personal expressions of spirituality, creativity, developing life skills, meditation, yoga, getting out into nature; exercise, nutrition, and addressing health risk factors like smoking.

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

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.....

THE BULL'S EYE: Read through your values, then make an X in each area of the dart board, to represent where you stand today. An X in the Bull's Eye (the centre of the board) means that you are living fully by your values in that area of life. An X far from Bull's Eye means that you are way off the mark in terms of living by your values.

Since there are four areas of valued living, you should mark **four Xs** on the dart board.

I am living fully by my values

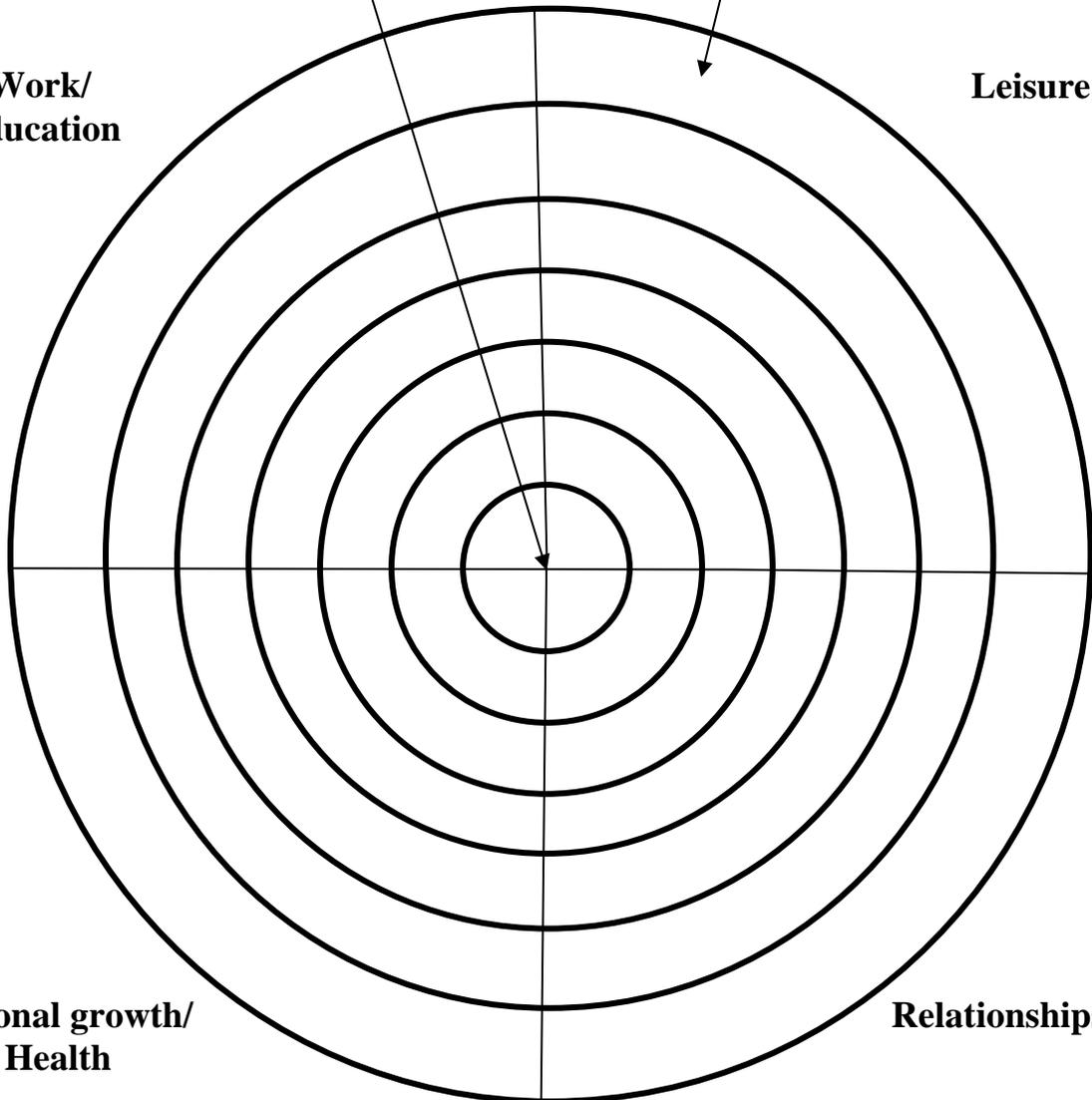
I am acting very inconsistently with my values

**Work/
Education**

Leisure

**Personal growth/
Health**

Relationships



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?*

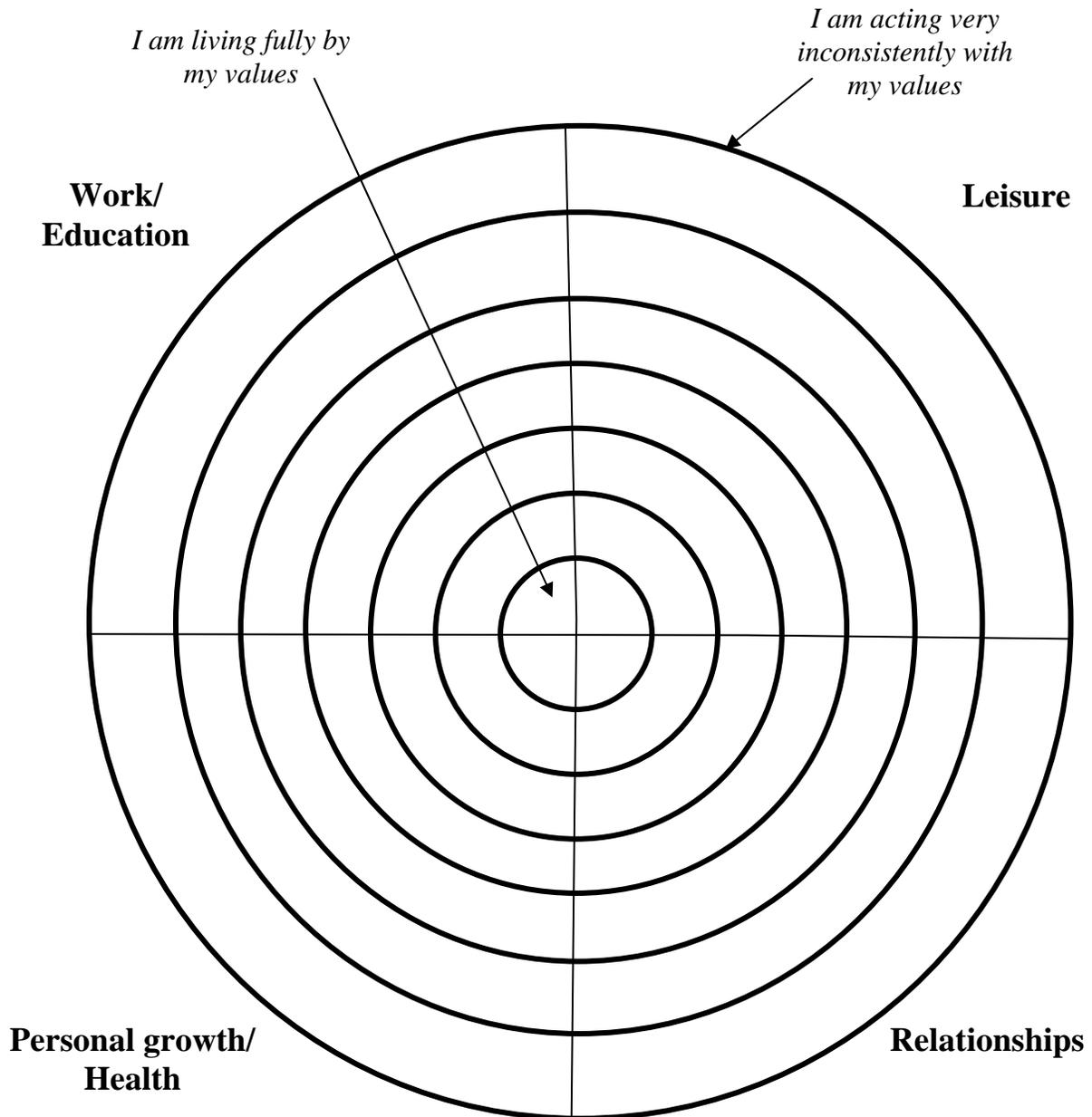
1. Work/Education: includes workplace, career, education, skills development, etc.

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.



Goal Setting Worksheet

Step 1: 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. There are different versions of this acronym. In my version, 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 ring 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.

*Also, make sure it's a live person's goal, not a dead person's goal. (If you can't remember what that means, re-read Chapter 27 of *The Happiness Trap*.)*

Step 2: 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:

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

- **Short Term Goals** (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)

Overcoming F.E.A.R. - 1

This handout complements chapter 30 of *The Happiness Trap*, although its content differs somewhat from the book. Let's assume you have clarified your values, and set yourself a goal – but you haven't followed through on it. What stopped you? The F.E.A.R. acronym covers most of the common barriers:

- F = Fusion (stuff your mind tells you that gets in the way when you get caught up in it)
- E = Excessive goals (your goal is too big, or you lack the skills, or you lack the resources)
- A = Avoidance of discomfort (unwillingness to make room for the discomfort this challenge brings)
- R = Remoteness from values (losing touch with - or forgetting - what is important or meaningful about this)

So now, in as few words as possible, write down everything that has stopped you following through:

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

6)

7)

8)

Now go back, and label each answer with one or two of the letters F, E, A, or R – whichever best describe this barrier. In other words, was it F = Fusion with a story (e.g. I'll fail; it's too hard; I'll do it later; I'm too weak; I can't do it); was it E = Excessive goal (you lacked the time, money, health, facilities, skills, or support necessary; or it was just too big and you got overwhelmed); was it A = Avoidance of discomfort (you were unwilling to make room for the anxiety, frustration, fear of failure, or other uncomfortable thoughts and feelings); or was it R = remoteness from your values (you forgot or lost touch with the values underlying this goal)?

The antidote to F.E.A.R. is D.A.R.E.

D = Defusion

A = Acceptance of discomfort

R = Realistic goals

E = Embracing values

Go through your barriers, one by one, and work out how you can deal with them, using D.A.R.E. Below, you'll find some suggestions to help you.

Overcoming F.E.A.R. – 2

Defusion strategies: name the story, thank your mind, acknowledge ‘Here’s reason-giving’ or ‘Here’s judging’, name the demon/monster/passenger, recognize this is Radio Doom & Gloom broadcasting, or simply let the thoughts come and go like passing cars.

Acceptance strategies: name the feeling, observe it like a curious scientist, rate it on a scale of 1 to 10, commit to allowing it, breathe into it, make room for it, give it a shape and color,

Realistic goal-setting: if you lack skills, set goals around learning them; if your goal is too big, break it down into small chunks; if you lack resources, brainstorm how you can get them; if the goal is truly impossible, e.g. due to health or financial issues, or external barriers over which you have no direct influence, then set a different one.

Embracing values: connect with what matters to you about this goal. Is it truly meaningful? Is it aligned with your values? Is it truly important? Is it moving your life forward in the direction you wish to go?

Using these ideas (and others of your own, or of your therapist/coach), write down how you can respond to the barriers you listed above.

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

6)

7)

8)

Finally, ask yourself this question: am I willing to make room for the difficult thoughts and feelings that show up, without getting caught up in them or struggling with them, and take effective action, in order to do what matters, deep in my heart?

If so: go ahead and give it a go.

If not, consider these questions:

Does this really and truly matter to you?

If it does, then what is the cost to you of avoiding it or putting it off?

Would you rather have the vitality-draining pain of staying stuck, or the life-enhancing pain of moving forward?

The Willingness and Action Plan

My goal is to (be specific):

The values underlying my goal are:

The actions I will take to achieve that goal are (be specific):

The thoughts/memories, feelings, sensations, urges I'm willing to make room for (in order to achieve this goal):-

- Thoughts/memories:

- Feelings:

- Sensations:

- Urges:

- It would be useful to remind myself that:

- If necessary, I can break this goal down into smaller steps, such as:

- The smallest, easiest step I can begin with is:

- The time, day and date that I will take that first step, is:

What To Do In A Crisis

A crisis can present in many different forms, from the death of a loved one, to loss of a job, to collapse of a marriage, to financial disaster. When you are hit by a crisis, an emotional storm is likely to whip through your mind and body, tossing painful thoughts and feelings in all directions. Here's what you can do to survive and thrive: **S.T.O.P.**

Slow your breathing

- Take a few deep breaths, and mindfully observe the breath flowing in and flowing out. This will help to anchor you in the present.

Take note

- Take note of your experience in this moment. Notice what you are thinking. Notice what you are feeling. Notice what you are doing. Notice how your thoughts and feelings are swirling around, and can easily carry you away if you allow them.

Open up

- Open up around your feelings. Breathe into them and make room for them. Open up to your thoughts too: take a step back and give them some room to move, without holding onto them or trying to push them away. See them for what they are and give them space, rather than fusing with them.

Pursue your values

- Once you've done the above three steps, you will be in a mental state of mindfulness. The next step is to respond to the crisis by pursuing a valued course of action. Connect with your values: ask yourself, 'What do I want to be about, in the face of this crisis? What do I want to stand for? How would I like to act, so that I can look back years from now and feel proud of my response?'

Things to Consider

- 1) Do you need, or would you benefit from help/assistance/support/advice? If so, what friends, neighbors, or relatives can you contact? What professionals could you arrange to see? (If necessary, what helpline numbers could you call?)
- 2) Have you experienced anything similar before? If so, how did you respond that was useful and helpful in the long term? Is there anything you learned from that experience that you can usefully apply now?
- 3) Is there anything you can do to improve the situation in any way? Are there any TINY steps you could take immediately that could be helpful? What are the smallest, simplest, easiest, tiny steps you could take:
 - a) in the next few minutes
 - b) in the next few hours
 - c) in the next few days*Note: the first step might simply be to spend a few minutes practicing some mindful breathing – or to take out a pen and paper and write an action plan.*
- 4) If there is nothing you can do to improve the situation, then are you willing to practice acceptance, using expansion and defusion skills, while engaging fully in the present moment? And given that the situation is unchangeable, how can you spend your time and energy constructively, rather than worrying or blaming or dwelling? Again, reconnect with your values: what do you want to be about in response to this situation? What are some tiny values-driven steps you can take?
- 5) You don't get to choose the deck of cards you are dealt in life; you only get to choose how you play with them. So a useful question to ask is: 'Given this is the hand I've been dealt, what's the best way to play with it? What personal strengths can I develop or strengthen as I go through this ordeal? How can I learn and grow from this experience?' *Note: any painful experience is an opportunity to develop your mindfulness skills.*
- 6) Be compassionate to yourself. Ask yourself, 'If someone I loved was going through this experience, feeling what I am feeling – if I wanted to be kind and caring towards them, how would I treat them? How would I behave towards them? What might I say or do?' Then try treating yourself the same way.

What's Wrong With My Partner/ Our Relationship? And What Happens When I Dwell On It?
 (From ACT With Love, Ch 1)

The purpose of this worksheet is to get clear about the most common judgments and criticisms you make about your partner – and the effect it has on you and your relationship when you get caught up in them, dwell on them, buy into them. Over the next few days, take note of all the thoughts you have about what is wrong with your relationship or your partner. Each day, take a few minutes to jot some of these thoughts down, and reflect on what happens to your mood, your attitude, and your relationship when you get all caught up in these thoughts?

Thoughts about what's wrong with my partner/ our relationship	How does my mood change when I get caught up in/ dwell on these thoughts?	When I buy into or dwell on these thoughts, what effect does it have on my relationship?

Identify the DRAIN In Your Relationship (From ACT With Love, Ch 2)

D – Disconnection, **R** – Reactivity, **A** – Avoidance, **I** – Inside your mind, **N** – Neglecting values

Disconnection: How do I disconnect from my partner? (E.g. do I get bored, irritable, stop listening? Do I go cold and distant? Do I close off/shut down? Am I distracted rather than present?)

How does my partner disconnect from me?

Reactivity: How do I react impulsively or automatically, without stopping to consider what I am doing? (E.g. do I yell, snap, swear, storm off, say hurtful things, criticize, blame, accuse, sneer, jeer?)

How does my partner react impulsively or automatically?

Avoidance: How do I try to avoid or get rid of my painful feelings that are related to the issues in this relationship? (E.g. do I use drugs, alcohol, food, cigarettes? Do I withdraw or stay away from my partner? Do I try to distract myself with TV, computers, books, going out? Do I avoid talking to my partner about the issue?)

How does my partner seem to avoid or get rid of his painful feelings?

Inside Your Mind: How do I get trapped inside my mind? (E.g. do I worry about the future, dwell on the past, relive old hurts, rehash old arguments, stew over everything that's wrong with my partner? Do I get caught up in judgment, blame, criticism? Do I get caught up in thoughts of rejection, betrayal, abandonment, or being controlled?)

How does my partner seem to get trapped inside his mind?

Neglecting Values: What core values do I neglect, forget about, or act inconsistently with, when I am disconnected, reactive, avoidant, or inside my mind? (E.g. do I lose touch with values such as being loving, kind, caring, generous, compassionate, supportive, fun-loving, easygoing, sensual, affectionate?)

What core values does my partner seem to neglect, forget about, or act inconsistently with?

If you're unwilling to work at your relationship

If you're not willing to work on your relationship, then you're effectively choosing to prolong your difficulties or make them worse. If this is where you're at right now, then take a few days to keep a daily record. At the end of each day, fill in the chart.

Notice the effect of "giving up" on your health and vitality.

Notice what this choice to "give up" is costing you—in terms of emotional pain, wasted time, wasted money, wasted energy, and further damage to your relationship.

Notice any actions you take that seem to improve your relationship or enhance your own well-being and vitality.

If you're unwilling to work at your relationship

Many people don't feel like working on their relationship. You might think it all seems too hard or it's pointless, or you shouldn't have to, or the fault is all with your partner. The problem is, if you're not willing to work on your relationship, then you're effectively choosing to prolong your difficulties or make them even worse. So if this is where you're at right now, then take a few days to notice what this attitude is costing you. At the end of each day, fill in the chart.

How did refusing to work on my relationship – thereby making it worse – affect my health and vitality today?	What did refusing to work on my relationship today cost me in terms of emotional pain, wasted time, wasted money, wasted energy, and further damage?	Did I do anything today that seemed to improve my relationship? What was it?

How Did You Meet Your Partner?

How did you first meet your partner?

Aside from looks, what did you find most attractive about him/her?

What personal qualities did you most admire about him/ her?

What did you enjoy doing together?

What did your partner do that made those times enjoyable?

Describe one of the most enjoyable days you've ever spent together. Where were you? What did you do? How did you interact? What sort of things did you say and do to each other? How was your body language?

What do you miss most about the early days of your relationship?

What do you see as your partner's greatest strengths, best personal qualities?

On Reflection:

Can you contact any sense of warmth or appreciation for your partner? Or do you merely see him as a burden, an obstacle, a hassle?

What happens when you take time to reflect on her strengths and positive qualities? Do you see her at all differently?

Do you find it hard to acknowledge his positive attributes because you are so focused on his flaws and weaknesses?

You're Both Hurting

Take a few minutes to write about the major issues in your relationship. Do this with nonjudgmental description rather than with harsh judgment and criticism. For example, write, "Greg does not often help out with the housework" instead of "Greg is a lazy bastard." If you notice a harsh judgment slipped past you, just make a mental note of it. Silently say to yourself, "Aha! There goes a judgment!" or "There's judging!" Then cross it out and write something nonjudgmental instead.

Write about the painful emotions you have experienced as a result of these issues. What painful thoughts and feelings have you struggled with? If the main feelings you notice are anger, fury, resentment, rage, or frustration, then see if you can "go deeper." These are typically surface emotions. Beneath the angry exterior, you will usually find something like hurt, sadness, guilt, shame, fear, rejection, loneliness,

Acknowledge, openly and honestly, that this relationship has been painful. You have suffered. It has not been easy. Given what you have been through, it's completely natural to feel the way you do.

Now this is the most challenging part: take a few minutes to reflect on how your partner has also suffered. He or she may never have spoken about this to you, so you may have to use your imagination here. Think about what it must be like for your partner to be on the receiving end of your complaints and criticisms. If she tends to cut off, go quiet, and withdraw, then what must that be like for her—hiding away and closing down in order to cope? If she tends to brood, dwell, and rehash the past, how painful must that be for her—suffering again and again by replaying old events that can never be undone? If he gets angry and yells, then how unpleasant must that feel for him to be eaten up with anger and resentment? Surely there is no joy or pleasure involved; how much must he suffer, lost in his rage?

How I try to control my partner

Spend some time reflecting on everything you have ever tried doing to control your partner—then assess how effective it was in the short run and what it cost you in the long run.

What my partner says or does that I don't like	What I have said or done to stop or change my partner's behavior	Did my actions change my partner's behavior in the long term?	Did my actions enhance and enrich our relationship in the long term? If not, what has this cost in terms of health, vitality, pain, wasted time, bitterness, anger, regret etc.

Who do I want to be in this relationship?

Imagine that it's ten years from now, and you have gathered together your closest friends and relatives to celebrate the last ten years of your relationship. This could be a small intimate affair in your family home or a plush affair in a fancy restaurant. It's your imagination, so make it look how you want.

Imagine that your partner stands up to make a speech about the last ten years of your life together—about what you stand for, what you mean to him/her, and the role that you have played in his/her life. Imagine your partner saying whatever it is, deep in your heart, you would most like to hear. (This is not about what they would realistically say—it's about what, in an ideal world, you would love to hear them say.) Imagine them describing your character, your strengths, and the ways in which you have contributed to the relationship.

Close your eyes now and take a couple of minutes to imagine this as vividly as possible, then write answers to the questions below.

What sort of personal qualities do you want to bring into play in your relationship?

What character strengths do you wish to employ or develop?

How do you want to behave or act on an ongoing basis?

What do you want to stand for as a partner?

Suppose we asked your partner to describe the ten things he or she most appreciates about your character or personality. In the ideal world, what would you most love your partner to say?

Values-Guided Actions

Write about little things you could do – simple, easy values-guided actions -- to enhance your relationship. Following are a few ideas to get you started. Although we're focusing here on the three core values of connecting, caring, and contribution, obviously these are not the only important values in a relationship, so please add others of your own.

Words: What can you say to your partner that promotes a deeper sense of connection or shows him that you care? How about "I love you," "I'm here for you," "Let me know how I can be of support," or "I appreciate having you in my life"? Even simple phrases such as "Thank you," "I'm sorry," or "Please forgive me" can go a long way if said genuinely. Consider text messages, cards, and e-mails as well as the spoken word.

Gestures: What actions can you take that contribute to your partner's health, well-being, and vitality? This might include anything from cooking dinner, fixing the car, or organizing a night out, to helping your partner with her chores or tasks, or giving small gifts such as flowers or CDs.

Physicality: How can you facilitate connection and caring physically? Consider hugging, kissing, holding hands, stroking hair, back rubs, sitting together on the couch, and so on.

How To Create Psychological Smog

This exercise shows you what happens when you hold on tightly to your thoughts, turning them into a thick “psychological smog”. Pull your journal or worksheet out once again, and using the examples in chapter 8 as a guide, write down as many “smoggy” thoughts as you can identify:

Shoulds

No Point Trying

If Only

Painful Past

Scary Future

Reason Giving

Judgments

I Know Why

Deep-Seated Fears

Okay, so now you’ve got a long list of “smoggy thoughts.” The next step is to read them through and buy into them as much as you can. Give them all your attention, dwell on them, believe them, get totally absorbed in them. The aim is to make the psychological smog as thick as it can possibly be, to get so absorbed in these thoughts that you basically lose touch with everything else. Do this for at least a minute, then answer the questions below.

When we get lost in the smog, we soon stumble into the quicksand of painful emotions; so what are you feeling right now?

How do you feel toward your partner right now?

Does dwelling on these thoughts help to improve your relationship – or make it worse?

Right now, do you feel like you want to act on your values—to care for and connect with your partner? Or do you feel more like giving up, running away, or lashing out?

The Values Gap

Suppose a miracle happened and your partner suddenly turned into your perfect “soul mate”: no faults at all, no annoying habits, always there for you, able to meet your every need, want, and desire If that happened, then how would *you* change? Please take your time to seriously consider this and write your answers below.

What would you stop, start, do more of and less of?

What sort of partner would you try to become? What sort of personal qualities would you develop?

What attitude would you cultivate toward your partner?

How would you speak to him/her when you wanted something?

How would you respond to him/her when they were in pain?

How would you treat him/her when they made a mistake or screwed up?

Is there a gap between the way you’d ideally like to behave as a partner – the values you’d like to live by -- and the way that you actually are behaving?

What is stopping you from living by your values right now?

What do you fear might happen if you did start to live more by your values?

What do you think needs to happen first before you can start living more by your values?

Do you believe your partner should change before you do? If so, what do you expect your partner to do?

The judgmental mind—part 1

So what does your mind say to you when it really wants to beat you up? When your mind turns into judge, jury, and executioner—when it lays out all the evidence about what’s wrong with you, judges you as not good enough, and sentences you to suffer—what does that sound like? If someone could listen in to your thoughts, what would they hear your mind saying?

Take a moment to jot down some of the things your mind says. Complete each sentence with as many words or phrases as you can think of.

When my mind wants to judge me as “not good enough,” this is what it says:

My mind tells me that I am a ...

My mind tells me that I am too ...

My mind tells me that I am not enough of a ...

My mind tells me that I do too much of the following:

My mind tells me that I don’t do enough of the following:

My mind tells me that I lack the following:

Once you’ve done that, read through the list, pick the self-judgment that bothers you the most, and shorten it to a simple phrase of no more than five or six words—for example, I’m a loser, I’m too selfish, or I’m not witty enough. Then either work through the exercises in chapter 9 of ACT With Love, or run through similar exercises with your coach/therapist

The judgmental mind—part 2

When my mind wants to hook me into the “bad partner” story, this is what it says:

It tells me that my partner is a ...

It tells me that my partner is too ...

It tells me that my partner is not enough of a ...

It tells me that my partner does too much of the following:

It tells me that my partner doesn't do enough of the following:

It tells me that my partner lacks the following:

When I get hooked by this story, here is how it affects me: (describe changes in your feelings and your attitude towards your partner, and the way you treat him/her)

When I get hooked by this story, here is how it affects our relationship:

Once you've done this, either work through the defusion exercises in chapter 9 of ACT With Love, or run through similar exercises with your coach/therapist

Fighting Tactics You Use

Write down the tactics you both use in fighting. Start by acknowledging your own tactics (both the fair and the dirty tactics):

“When I want to win a fight, this is what I do ...”

“When my partner wants to win a fight, this is what he/she does ...”

Preferred Tactics And Ground Rules

Complete the following sentences, and then share your answers with your partner.

When we're having a fight --

I'd like you to accept me doing this:

I want to stop myself from doing this:

I'm willing to accept you doing this:

I want you to stop doing this:

Chasing And Running

Discuss chasing and running (as described in chapter 15 of ACT With Love). Share your answers with your partner.

Runners: When do you run? How do you feel immediately before you run? Why do you run? How do you feel when your partner chases you?

Chasers: When do you chase? How do you feel if your partner runs away? Why do you pursue? How do you feel when you're chasing?

Now put yourself in your partner's shoes. Think hard about what that would feel like. Write down what you imagine it must be like for them when they're running away or chasing after you:

Appreciating Your Partner

Fill in this form each day. It's okay if there's overlap and repetition between columns. Notice (at least) three things you appreciate about your partner. They don't have to be big things; they can be tiny. It might be the way he smiles, or the sound of her laughter.

Contemplate what your partner adds to your life. If you're stuck for ideas, consider these questions: If my partner were on his deathbed, what would I tell him I appreciated most about him? If my partner died, what would I find hardest about living alone? Each day notice (at least) three ways in which your partner contributes to your life. Again, they don't have to be big things. It might be the simple fact that she goes to work to earn money to help pay for some of the things you enjoy having. Or the simple pleasure of having someone to talk to over dinner. Or the feeling of added security you have when you're not alone.

Think back to when you first met your partner: what personal qualities and strengths did she have? What did he say or do that made him attractive? In all likelihood, those strengths and qualities are still there today. Each day notice (at least) three things your partner says or does that are representative of her personal strengths and qualities.

3 Things I Noticed Today That I Appreciate About My Partner	3 Ways My Partner Contributed To My Life Today	3 Things My Partner Said or Did Today That Represent Their Best Strengths and Qualities

Creating A Forgiveness Ritual

Many couples find it is very healing to create their own forgiveness ritual. You can use your own creativity to adapt this worksheet into something more personal.

Step 1: Complete these three sentences:

The thoughts, feelings, and memories I've been holding on to are:

Holding on to all this has hurt our relationship in the following ways:

I want to build a better relationship, based on the following values:

Step 2: Write, in your own words, a commitment to let all these painful thoughts and feelings come and go, again and again and again, no matter how many times they come back, without holding on to them or getting caught up in them:

My commitment is to ...

Step 3: Choose a special place and read your answers aloud to each other. This could be anywhere from a special room in your house, to a park or a beach. As one partner reads, the other listens mindfully and compassionately. Discuss this in advance, and write down what you will do:

Step 4: Do something that symbolizes starting over—for example, burn the letters and scatter the ashes. Discuss this in advance, and write down what you will do:

Step 5: Do something to connect lovingly—for example, kiss, hug, go out to dinner, or have a bath together. Discuss this in advance, and write down what you will do:

Screwing Up

Human beings screw up so often, it's important to consider these three questions:

When your partner screws up, how would you ideally respond?

When you screw up, how would you ideally like your partner to respond?

When either one of you screws up, what would you ideally say or do to handle it effectively and make amends?

Before answering these questions, get in touch with your values; reflect on the sort of partner you want to be. If you could respond mindfully, acting on your deepest values, then what would you say and do when one of you screws up? Are you willing to forgive, let go, and move on? Are you willing to make room for your painful feelings, let go of unhelpful thoughts, and discuss the issue in a way that allows for repairs? Are you willing to apply the principles of positive reinforcement (as described in chapter 18 of ACT With Love) to catch your partner doing it right and thank them, rather than come down hard when they do it wrong? And if not, what will your lack of willingness cost you in the long run? Now write your answers, below.

When your partner screws up, how would you ideally respond? What would you ideally say and do, with what sort of attitude?

When you screw up, how would you ideally like your partner to respond? What would they ideally say and do, with what sort of attitude?

When either you or your partner screws up, what would you ideally say or do to handle it effectively and/or make amends?

When either you or your partner screws up, what would you ideally like your partner to say or do, to handle it effectively and/or make amends?

Your Relationship: Looking Backwards

You can do this exercise for the last day, week or month, whichever you prefer. Look back over the last 24 hours (or last week or month), and reflect a) on the values-guided actions you have taken and b) actions you have taken that were inconsistent with those values. Which actions enhanced and enriched your relationship? Which actions had the opposite effect? (Note: there is no such thing as a “right” or “wrong” value. The left hand column contains common values that many couples share, but these may not be your values, so rewrite them as you wish.)

Relationship Values	Values- guided actions	Values-inconsistent actions
Connection		
Caring		
Contribution		
Respect		
Fairness		
Acceptance		
Assertiveness		
Sensuality		
Sexuality		
Having fun		
Kindness		
Teamwork		
Support/encouragement		
Trust		
Honesty		

Your Relationship: Moving Forwards

You can do this exercise for the last day, week or month, whichever you prefer. Look ahead to the next 24 hours (or week or month), and reflect a) on the values-guided actions you could take and b) actions that you could take that would be inconsistent with those values. Which actions would be likely to enhance and enrich your relationship? Which actions would be likely to have the opposite effect? (Note: there is no such thing as a “right” or “wrong” value. The left hand column contains common values that many couples share, but if these are not your values, please rewrite them.)

Relationship Values	Values- guided actions	Values-inconsistent actions
Connection		
Caring		
Contribution		
Respect		
Fairness		
Acceptance		
Assertiveness		
Sensuality		
Sexuality		
Having fun		
Kindness		
Teamwork		
Support/encouragement		
Trust		
Honesty		

Appendix 4

GOAL SETTING

Effective goal setting is quite a skill and it does require a bit of practice to get the hang of it.

The method that follows is adapted with permission from ‘The Weight Escape’ workshops and e-course created by Ann Bailey, Joe Ciarrochi and Russ Harris, © 2010. (Their book, *The Weight Escape*, will also be published by Penguin Books (Australia) in June 2012.) You can download a free pdf of this worksheet from the Free Resources page on www.thehappinesstrap.com.

The Five-Step Plan for Goal Setting and Committed Action

Step 1. Identify Your Guiding Values

Identify the value or values that will underpin your course of action.

Step 2. Set a SMART goal

It's not effective to set any old goal that springs to mind. Ideally, you want to set a SMART goal. Here's what the acronym means:

S = specific (Do not set a vague, fuzzy, or poorly-defined goal like, 'I'll be more loving'. Instead, be specific: 'I'll give my partner a good, long hug when I get home from work'. In other words, *specify* what actions you will take.)

M = meaningful (Make sure this goal is aligned with important values.)

A = adaptive (Is this goal likely to improve your life in some way?)

R = realistic (Make sure the goal is realistic for the resources you have available. Resources you may need could include: time, money, physical health, social support, knowledge and skills. If these resources are necessary but unavailable, you will need to change your goal to a more realistic one. The new goal might actually be to find the missing resources: to save the money, or develop the skills, or build the social network, or improve health, etc.)

T = time-framed (Put a specific time frame on the goal: specify the day, date and time — as accurately as possible — that you will take the proposed actions.)

Write your SMART goal here:

Step 3. Identify Benefits

Clarify for yourself, what would be the most positive outcome(s) of achieving your goal? (However, *don't* start fantasising about how wonderful life will be after you achieve your goal; research shows that fantasising about the future actually reduces your chances of following through!) Write the benefits below:

Step 4. Identify Obstacles

Imagine the potential difficulties and obstacles that might stand in the way of you achieving your goals, and how you will deal with them if they arise. Consider:

- a) what are the possible *internal* difficulties (difficult thoughts and feelings, such as low motivation, self-doubt, distress, anger, hopelessness, insecurity, anxiety, etc.)?
- b) what are the possible *external* difficulties (things aside from thoughts and feelings that might stop you, e.g. lack of money, lack of time, lack of skills, personal conflicts with other people involved)?

If internal difficulties arise in the form of thoughts and feelings, such as:

_____ then I will use the following mindfulness skills to unhook, make room and get present:

If external difficulties arise, such as:

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

then I will take the following steps to deal with them:

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

Step 5. Make A Commitment

Research shows that if you make a public commitment to your goal (i.e. if you state your goal to at least one other person), then you are far more likely to follow through on it. If you're not willing to do this, then at the very least make a commitment to yourself. But if you really *do* want the best results, then be sure to make your commitment to somebody else.

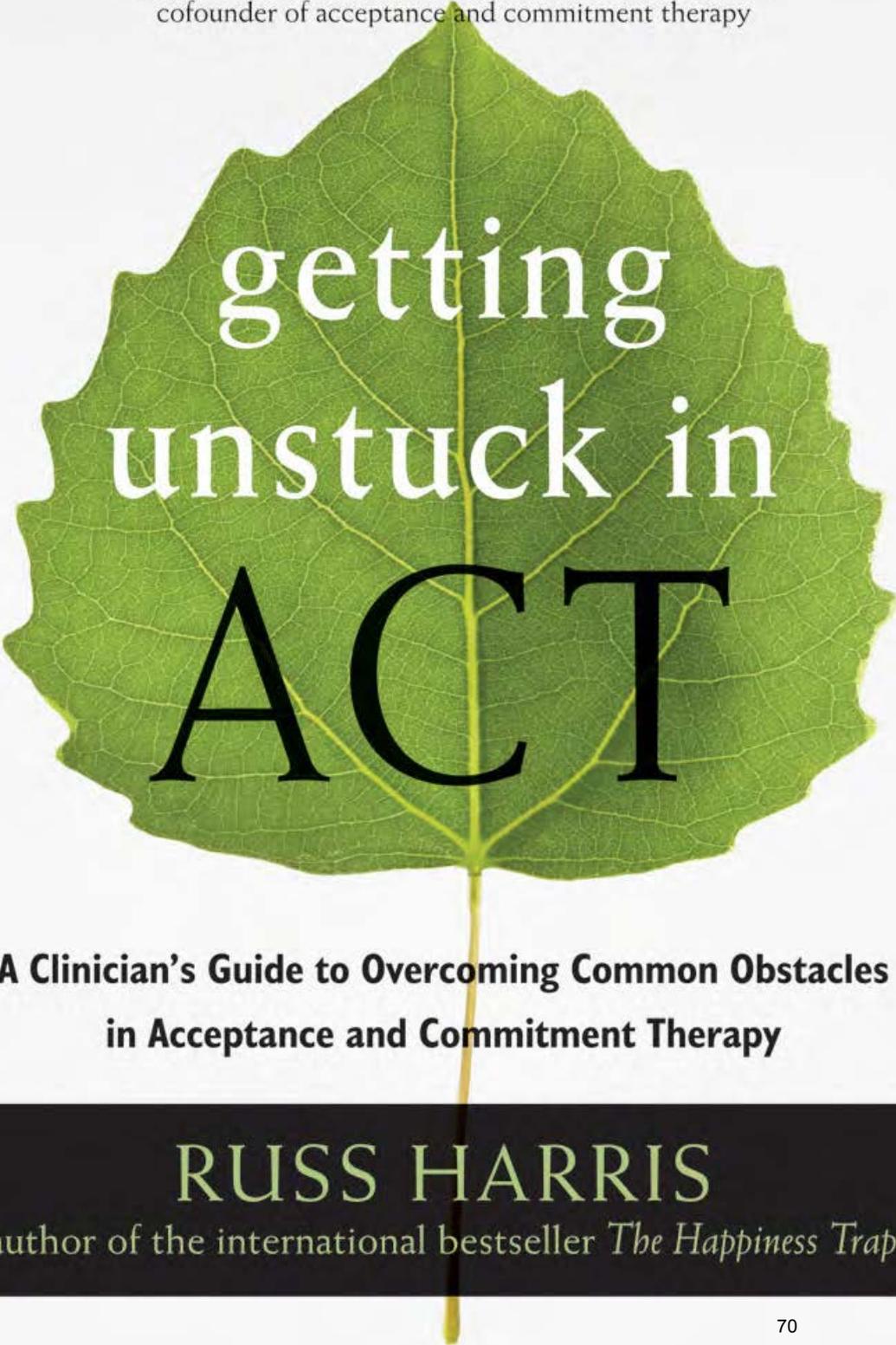
I commit to (*write your values-guided SMART goal here*):

Now say your commitment out loud — ideally to someone else, but if not, to yourself.

Other Helpful Tips For Goal Setting

- Make a step-by-step plan: break your goal down into concrete, measurable and time-based sub-goals.
- Tell other people about your goal and your ongoing progress: making a public declaration increases commitment.
- Reward yourself for making progress in your goal: small rewards help push you on to major success. (A reward might be as simple as saying to yourself, 'Well done! You made a start!')
- Record your progress: keep a journal, graph or drawing that plots your progress.

“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?*

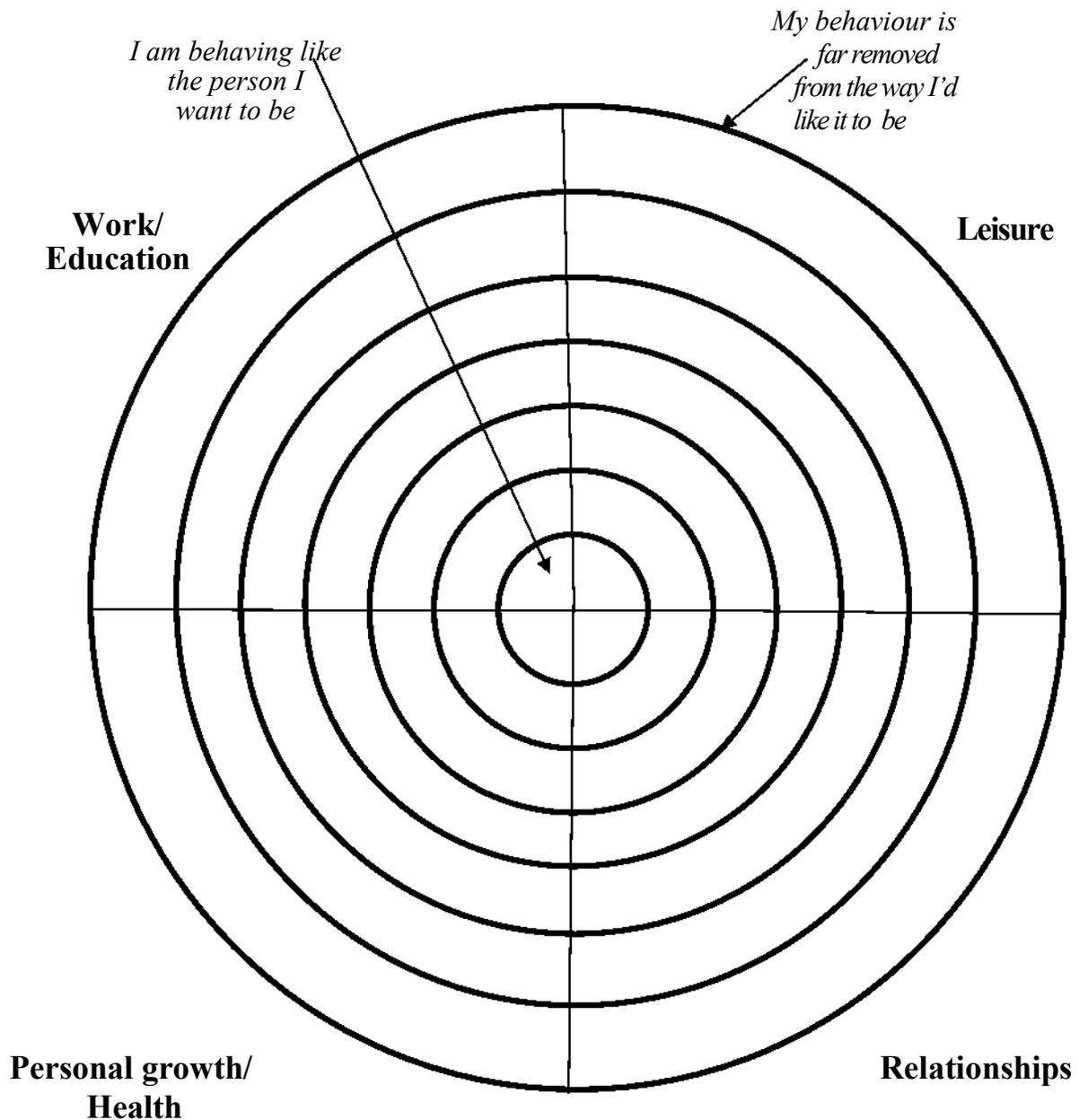
1. Work/Education: includes workplace, career, education, skills development, etc.

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

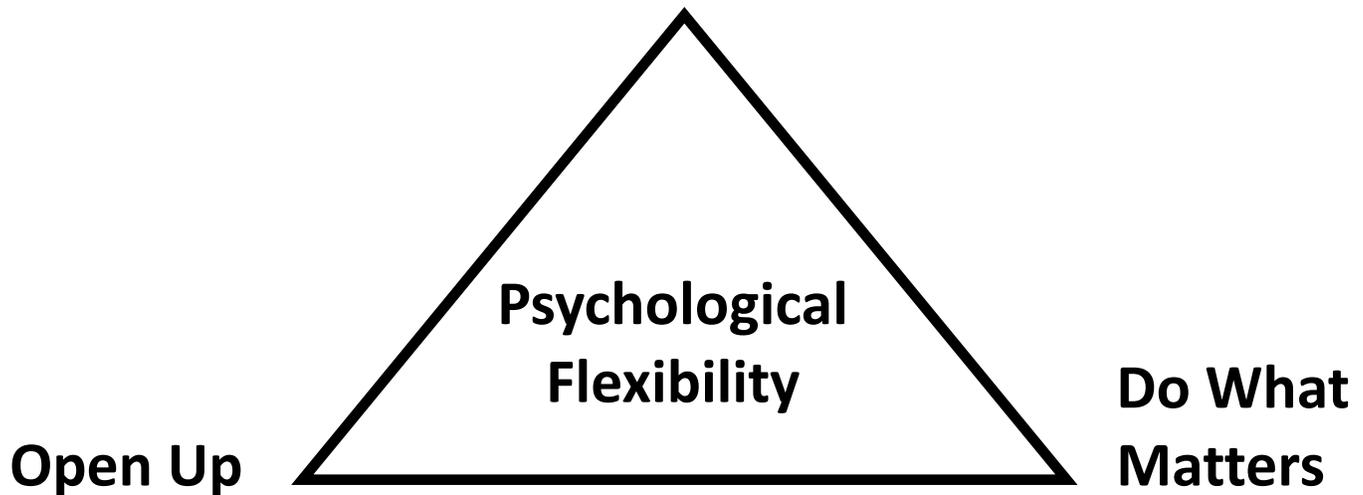
It’s very easy for us to forget what our goals are. So how can we create “reminders”? Can we put messages or alerts in the computer, mobile phone, calendar, or journal? Can we ask people in our support network to remind us? Can we stick up notes on the mirror or the fridge or the car dashboard? Can we 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?