

14. USING THE SWISS CHEESE METHOD

WHILE A CAREFULLY THOUGHT-OUT plan with well-defined goals and priorities is a giant step toward getting control of your time (and your life), even good planners often manage to forget one detail: A plan, like any tool, is valuable only if it's *used*. The best plans remain daydreams until you bring them to life through action.

In the case of most routine tasks—such as eating or brushing your teeth—planning leads directly to action. Even when you tackle more complex activities, planning and doing may be so closely tied together that they seem parts of the same step. A good plan—a plan that in all ways *feels* right to you—has a way of getting you to act on it simply because it's in front of you. After you finish such a plan, it draws you right into starting on the high-priority items.

At other times this transition from planning to action goes less smoothly. Let's assume that as a result of your planning (Listing/Setting Priorities, answering Lakein's Question) you've zeroed in on a particular task as your A-1: Today you're going to wash all the windows in the house! But instead of acting on your plan, you hesitate. Perhaps you feel like turning to a less-important task, or quitting for the day to go to a movie or merely to draw doodles in the dirt on the windows. Your attitude toward doing the A-1 is "do it later" rather than "do it now." Perhaps, for reasons I've discussed earlier (see Chapter 10), you'll settle on doing a C-task.

I've talked with thousands of people about their efforts to gain control of their time and their lives. Again and again I hear the familiar refrain, "For years I've been wanting to do this, but I keep putting it off," or "I know just what to do but I can't find time to get started."

Procrastination! It's one of the major stumbling blocks everybody faces in trying to achieve both short-term and

long-term goals. But rather than let procrastination seize control of you, how about doing something positive?

Have You Picked the Correct A-1?

When you've identified an A-1 but find yourself reluctant to "do it now," take a fresh look at your choice. Your reluctance may be based on an intuitive feeling that the A-1 is not, after all, the best use of your time. Your intuition is often right. Avoiding the A-1 may be a smarter decision than your selection of the A-1 in the first place. Suppose your A-1 is learning how to sail, but you find that the instructor charges more than you can afford. Not following through on your plan may be the wisest course.

Perhaps your choice of an A-1 was the right one at the time, but now your priorities have suddenly and unexpectedly shifted. You have to forego spring housecleaning this week because Aunt Mary from Boston arrives on your doorstep three days early for her annual visit. Or you sit down at your desk to pay some bills when the mailman delivers a letter from your bank saying your last check bounced. Obviously, your A-1 is to straighten out your messed-up checking account; paying the bills will have to wait.

Putting off work on an A-1 is also wise when you find it will lead to consequences you didn't foresee when you sat down to plan. An advertising executive had decided that the best use of his time would be to respond to a big manufacturer's request for a preliminary presentation of an advertising campaign that might bring the advertising man a lot of additional business. He was disturbed because he had failed to follow through on this request for several weeks.

After brooding about this failure, he finally realized what was holding him back. Although this was an account he had long wanted, he knew that if he landed it, he would spend the next several months designing a huge campaign from scratch. But he already felt terribly overworked as it was. No wonder he was reluctant to tackle his A-1!

Once the advertising executive realized this, he knew that his problem was not procrastination but a matter of priorities. His real A-1 should have been to do something to ease (rather than add to) his work pressures, so he spent the next

week training a subordinate to take over some of his routine work. Only then did he go back to thinking about the new account. He started in immediately, and, no longer held back by his former reluctance, he created a stunning proposal that landed the account.

So if you don't follow through on a plan because the choice is not current or valid, your delay is not due to procrastination, but to a desire to be flexible and adaptable. You're right not to go forward with your first A-1. The best course is to downgrade the former A-1. Pick out a new A-1 that better fits your changed priorities or unexpected opportunities, and make sure you "do it now."

Procrastination is . . .

Procrastination is when you've come up with a good A-1 activity, validated your choice, and found at least some minutes you could have spent on that A-1, and you are still not with it. Instead, you are doing a lesser A, a B, a C, or maybe even a task that you should admit is not worth doing at all. What in the world is wrong with you?

Mostly, you're just being human. And like most of my clients you undoubtedly procrastinate most on "Overwhelming A-1s" and "Unpleasant A-1s." People put off doing an Overwhelming A-1 because it seems too complex or too time-consuming (such as washing all the windows, redecorating the house, cataloging the slides of your last six years' vacations, mastering Russian, preparing your tax return when you claim a lot of deductions, moving to a new house, selling your business to retire, planning a trip around the world).

An Unpleasant A-1, on the other hand, is manageable, all right, but you're eager to avoid it because of some odious association, which is usually emotional (disciplining an employee, admitting an awkward mistake to your boss, telling your boss *he* made a mistake, presenting your husband with the bill for a very expensive dress).

These two categories are not mutually exclusive. Anybody can think of activities that seem both overwhelming and unpleasant. The strategies for dealing with each are different. The next several chapters will be devoted to a discussion of how to

handle the problem of procrastination on an Overwhelming A-1. After that I will turn to ways to stop procrastinating on the Unpleasant A-1.

CAUTION: All the techniques to stop procrastinating are to be used only when genuinely necessary. It would be a great waste of your time to keep working with these techniques rather than doing your A-1. The goal, as ever, is to *select your A-1 and do it now*. The techniques are simply means to an end and that end is to make better use of your time.

How to Overwhelm the Overwhelming A-1

Suppose you're at home and have just finished some chores. Your son will return from school in half an hour. You'd like to start on a painting you've been thinking about for weeks, but you wash up a few dirty dishes and mop the kitchen floor instead. After all, how can you possibly accomplish anything on your painting when you know you'll be interrupted so soon?

Or suppose you're at work and you've just finished a phone call. As you put down the receiver, you think to yourself that the best use of your time right now—the A-1—is to start work on the time-consuming, complex task of preparing the annual budget for your department. You glance at your watch. It's ten minutes before you usually go to lunch. A stack of routine paperwork is sitting on one corner of your desk, awaiting your attention. What should you do? Get a couple of quick paperwork C's out of the way? Or put ten minutes into the A-1-task, even though you feel quite overwhelmed by the prospect? Or go to lunch early?

The best answer—which is to get started on that Overwhelming A-1 even with only a few minutes at your disposal—seem unrealistic, even meaningless. You may well decide to get a few easy C's out of the way instead. On the face of it, this does not seem to be a very serious breach of good time-management practices, except that a person's day is typically divided up into bits and pieces. Let's face it: Large blocks of uninterrupted time are a comparative rarity. If again and again—a few minutes before lunch or before your child returns from school—you choose to work on the easy C

rather than to begin the difficult A-1, then you are procrastinating; you're avoiding what is really important.

In most cases, when a person turns to the short and easy C, he does so precisely because it is short and easy. What you need is some way to make the Overwhelming A-1 competitive with the easy C.

But how? Let's say you have estimated that it'll take you fifty hours to formulate the budget, and you have only those ten minutes available before lunch. The fact that you cannot find anything like fifty hours today may well cause you to put off starting the project until tomorrow. But of course there aren't fifty hours available the next day either, so you may delay day after day until, with the deadline looming, you finally make a frantic effort to get the job done—and probably none too well, because you're in such a rush.

The key to getting an Overwhelming A-1 under control is to get started on it as soon as you've identified it as the A-1 task. And an excellent way to get moving is to turn such an Overwhelming A-1 into "Swiss Cheese" by poking some holes in it. I call these holes "instant tasks."

An instant task requires five minutes or less of your time and makes some sort of hole in your Overwhelming A-1. So in ten minutes before lunch you have time for two instant tasks. To find out what the first two should be, (1) make a list of possible instant tasks, and (2) set priorities.

Here are some Swiss Cheese moves toward tackling the budget problem: getting a copy of last year's budget, deciding on the people you'll need to contact, obtaining the files you'll need, arranging a meeting to discuss the budget, or going to lunch with a subordinate and turning over part of the task (or all the preliminaries) to him. The only rule for making up your list of possible instant tasks is to limit it to items that can be started quickly and easily and are in some way connected with working on the Overwhelming A-1.

What Five Minutes Can Do

The underlying assumption of the Swiss Cheese approach is that it is indeed possible to get something started in five minutes or less. And once you've started, you've given yourself the opportunity to keep going. For example, you may become so interested in reading one of the files that you study

it for forty-five minutes before realizing how hungry you are. Swiss Cheese may well become your lunch—non-fattening but eminently satisfying.

It's just as likely that you will start somewhere only to find that it quickly leads to a dead end. You try to call someone to arrange a meeting on the budget for after lunch. He's not available until tomorrow. So now you feel satisfied that you've done your bit on *that* project for the day. You may even be glad to have failed in your first effort; it's such a convenient excuse for further procrastination! That's an unpromising start. Swiss Cheese is supposed to lead to *involvement*.

So if that first effort failed, be patient for another moment. Think of a new instant task and give it a try.

Don't try to bite the same hole out of the cheese twice. If you've tried an instant task and it didn't lead to involvement, the next step is to try another instant task right away. And remember: One hole does not make a piece of Swiss Cheese. It may take a number of instant tasks before you finally get involved with the big A-1 and gather the momentum needed to stay with it.

One nice thing about the Swiss Cheese method is that it doesn't really matter what instant task you select as long as it's (1) easy—the easier the better—and (2) related to the Overwhelming A-1. How much of a contribution a particular instant task will make to getting your A-1 done is far less important than the overriding objective of the moment: To do something—anything—on the A-1. Whatever you choose, you'll at least have begun.

The Swiss Cheese approach sometimes makes it possible to achieve surprising inroads even on a complex project. After you've made ten or twelve holes in an Overwhelming A-1, you may discover with delight that the task turns out to be much less difficult than you'd expected. Perhaps you've found a way to turn over much of the project to someone else. Or you've discovered an unsuspected short cut. Or the job turns out to be easy and fun. Maybe all that was required was to break up the task into manageable bites; after you've done this some jobs, like some jigsaw puzzles, are easily completed.

Make A Last-Ditch Try

If you can't bring yourself to tackle the A-1, perhaps you should compromise. Suppose you've managed so far today to escape from the A-1. Before you go on to other things, make one last-ditch try at getting involved. Look at your watch and note the time. Spend exactly five minutes on the A-1 and then stop for the day. Surely you can stand almost any task for five minutes!

Picture yourself on your summer vacation by the lake. You've been lingering on the shore imagining how cold the water must be. You ask some people standing at the water's edge, and they tell you that it's really cold. They've gone in, though, and seem to have enjoyed it. You'd like to try it, too, but you're leery of the cold water.

Finally, you walk to the end of the dock and put your big toe into the water—it feels cold, all right. You put your whole foot in—it feels colder. You sit down and painfully put both feet into the water—it's colder still. You let your knees relax, and the water comes up to your calves—it's painfully cold.

This bit-by-bit torture is getting you down, so you tell yourself you'll quit in five minutes. You stand up. Should you jump or dive in? You decide to jump in, swim the fifty feet to the float, swim back, and—if you aren't enjoying it by then—climb out, dry yourself off, and play Ping-Pong.

There doesn't seem to be any right time to jump in. You decide to count down from one hundred. One hundred, ninety-nine, ninety-eight, . . . each number comes slower than the one before it. Four, three, two, one, jump! You're in the water and swimming toward the float.

Go Ahead: Quit If You Must

An hour later you may still be in the water—if you decided you liked the exuberance of swimming and playing in the chilly water. If you quit after five minutes you'll be waiting your turn for a rematch with the Ping-Pong king.

Back home the following week, you might wonder whether you can use this "quit in five minutes" guarantee to start exercising. Your doctor said you need more exercise.

You've already bought the exercise manual, but the exercises look too awful for words. Each morning during the two weeks before your vacation you got out of bed and groaned, "No, not today. Maybe tomorrow."

You're tired of groaning and would like to be in better shape. You decide that surely you can take five minutes of exercise. You get the kitchen timer and set it for five minutes. You open the manual and begin the exercises, keeping one eye on the clock. As soon as it rings, you're saved by the bell from further exertion and you groan in relief. You haven't given up groaning, but at least you've begun your exercise regime. Maybe the same trick will work again tomorrow. Maybe you might gradually increase the time to six, seven, or possibly eight minutes.

Back at work you find that you can use this "quit in five minutes" teaser to get yourself involved. You realize that you are delaying the A-1 project because you fear the worst, but once you get into it things will not be as awful as you imagine them to be (isn't that often the case?). So you spend five minutes and do a little experimenting. You dip gingerly into some aspect of the A-1.

What did you learn? Was the A-1 as unpleasant as you imagined? Was it dull? Was it really all that overwhelming? Was it that difficult? Will it take that many hours? Isn't there any hope of success?

You can't expect to get too good an answer to all these questions in just five minutes. And if you happen to forget about them as your interest in the A-1 increases, it really doesn't matter. If this effort did not get you off and running on the A-1, at least you know a little more than you did before. Maybe your subconscious will help you come up with a fresh approach to the A-1 tomorrow. And don't try to tell yourself that you would have spent all Wednesday afternoon working on the A-1 if you hadn't spent five minutes today and discovered how unpleasant it is! You know deep down inside that the first five minutes Wednesday would have been your quota for the day. Now you can spend your *second* five minutes on it Wednesday—or perhaps the whole afternoon.

At other times you'll find, even after ten or twenty instant tasks, that you still have a complex and time-consuming project ahead of you. You are unlikely to finish a twelve-hour job by working only in five-minute bites. You'll have to set

aside large blocks of time, hours or days, to complete it. I suggest you take your calendar and lay out a schedule of an hour a day, except for three hours each Tuesday and Thursday afternoon (or whatever) until the twelve hours have been reserved. Then let the logic of the task itself dictate steps to keep it moving.

The instant tasks may not have gotten the project finished, but they have led you to explore various aspects of it. You have become involved in an interesting question here, a challenging problem there. The project begins to exert a stronger and stronger pull. You become more eager to get back to it. You've zeroed in on your target. You're involved; you no longer need the crutch of instant tasks. You have stopped procrastinating. You're doing the A-1!

The method, I think you'll agree, sounds good. On the following pages I'll describe a wide range of instant tasks—quick, easy ways to get started—that will not only aid in eliminating procrastination, but will help break up any large task into smaller, more do-able activities.

15. HOW TO FIND INSTANT TASKS FOR INSTANT INVOLVEMENT

Do More Detailed Planning

So YOU'RE HAVING TROUBLE getting involved in the A-1. Are you sure you've really drawn a bead on exactly what it is you want to accomplish? If that's your trouble, you probably need to do more detailed planning. As a general rule, the more detailed the plan, the better the chance that action will follow. And remember: Planning is really decision-making.

First, I'm going to show you how to make some decisions to solidify your feelings about the A-1.

Take a piece of paper and head it "I have decided." You are now ready for five minutes of Decision Time.

Record on the paper whatever decisions come to your mind about the A-1. For instance: when to start it; what to do first; what to do next; how much time you can devote to it all together; what information you need; what equipment is required; who else will be involved. The more concrete decisions you can make, the more likely it is you'll fix on some simple but valuable ways to start on the A-1 and get involved.

If you run into snags doing this kind of detailed planning, I recommend you try "The Magic If."

Admit to yourself: "I just cannot plan." Then say to yourself, "But if I could plan, what would the plan be?" Now, set about to answer the *if* question. The beauty of the "I can't . . . but if I could . . . question is that it temporarily frees you from all the limitations and problems you face. It unblocks the planning muscles, as many of my clients have discovered.

Or imagine this: You've been relieved of all responsibility for getting a difficult A-1 done. Instead, you only have to write down a plan for someone else to follow. You're simply to give this person whatever good advice you can, based on your familiarity with the project up to now. Once you've

prepared your plan, the entire burden of carrying out the plan will be shifted to his shoulders. You never have to *do* anything. Your only task is to plan how someone else should do it.

Now, what would you recommend to this person? Don't worry if some of the steps you recommend might be difficult for you. The other fellow will be the one to do them—that is what he's there for.

Next, put the written plan in the center of your desk and take a break. Go to the water cooler. Talk with a friend. Relax. When you return to your desk, look at the written plan the other person is going to follow and see if there is anything you might do to help him out. You will probably find there are steps within the plan involving work that you're particularly good at or that you enjoy doing. Until the other fellow shows up, how about getting going on these preferred parts of the plan, just to start the A-1 rolling?

It's a fact: not only can The Magic If make it possible for you to plan what is to be done, it will often enable you to follow through as well.

Get More Information

Sometimes I just can't get started on a project no matter how hard I try. I once decided to lay a patio in my backyard. But I knew nothing about the materials or tools I was going to need. I never did start working on my patio.

This is a common chain, and a deadly one. You don't have the information. You don't get really interested. You can't become involved. No action.

The old adage about familiarity breeding contempt is often untrue. Non-familiarity often leads to lack of interest. I once read of an experiment with high school students who were presented with a list of forty-eight questions about invertebrate animals. The students were asked to indicate the twelve questions to which they would most like to know the answers. Surprise! Questions about familiar animals were picked more often than questions about unfamiliar animals.

In another study, students were shown some unusual objects borrowed from museums. The experimenter went through the collection of objects three times, giving more in-

formation each time around. Whenever an object was presented, the students were asked to indicate on a 1-to-5 scale the extent to which they wanted to know more about it. There was a significant tendency for more curiosity to be expressed with each successive appearance of an object.

Here is experimental evidence that it takes at least a little information to generate an interest in something. The same is true in our everyday experience. Listener surveys of radio and TV news programs show that people who listen to the six-o'clock news often listen to the 11 o'clock news as well. The same people who listen to the news regularly are likely to read one or two newspapers seriously. Some information leads to eagerness for more.

Who reads hobby magazines? People who already know something about the hobby. Whether it's model railroading, skiing, or gardening, most readers of such publications are regular readers eager for new ideas. Someone just glancing at such magazines on a newsstand may well wonder how anyone could find them interesting. Lacking background knowledge and a frame of reference, they find the details meaningless.

Not until a certain level of familiarity with a subject is reached are people likely to push toward a further exploration to satisfy the newly aroused curiosity. Once that level is reached, there is a good chance that involvement will increase as knowledge accumulates—which is why getting more information is an instant task that leads to involvement.

Reading is one of the easiest instant tasks for most people. Looking at books, magazines, newspapers, internal reports, memoirs, files, or letters for even a few minutes may stimulate your interest in a subject that you never much cared about before—and it's leisurely activity that requires little energy.

Another good way to get more information is to talk to people. People in your organization. In your neighborhood. In your family. Talking is a pleasant way to get more information about your A-1.

Try a Leading Task

When you really aren't quite up to doing anything on your A-1, but are not averse to getting ready to do something, taking a physical step can often be a way of easing yourself gradually into the big job. I call this a "leading task" because it leads you on.

An obvious instant task to get you started on writing a report is to make some notes on the points to be covered. But suppose even this seems too much to tackle. Try sharpening a pencil. I'm not joking! Involvement will not necessarily ensue, but at least there is a chance that, once you have the freshly sharpened pencil in your hand, you will let the pencil impel you to write a few words of value before you put it down again.

The physical presence of some item associated with your A-1 can also be a compelling stimulus leading to involvement. A good leading task is to move such an item to a conspicuous place. You have a letter that you know you should answer, but have been avoiding. Try putting it right in the middle of your desk. This increases the chance that sooner or later you will pick it up and get started on a reply, perhaps when you are seeking diversion from some other task. Another good leading task is to remove all distractions from your desktop (such as expense accounts, cocktail-party invitations, or that copy of *Playboy*). Your chances that you will turn to the A-1 will materially increase if it's the only item staring you in the face.

If you really want to read *War and Peace*, but just don't seem to get around to it, here are some good leading tasks. Buy a copy. Take it off your bookshelf. Put it in your favorite reading chair. Leave it lying around opened to page 1. Show it to a friend and say, "I've finally started on this!"

People often tell me about some hobby they once enjoyed but now only dream about. One man told me how much he regretted that he hadn't played tennis in five years. I learned that his tennis racket was at the bottom of a storage chest, and that the only tennis balls he owned were old and had no bounce. No wonder playing tennis was just a dream for him!

Doing a leading task would certainly increase this man's

chances of once again enjoying a game of tennis. He might have his racket restrung. Or buy some new tennis balls. Or put all his equipment in the trunk of his car. If he still found himself driving past an empty tennis court without stopping, he could put his racket on the front seat so that he had to move it to get into his car. With this constant stimulus—or irritant—as a reminder, if he's really serious about wanting to play tennis, he'll eventually take his racket out of his car, and even hit a few balls. Whether he'll remain involved is another matter—which we shall turn to later. In any case, he will have gotten started and at least given himself the chance to continue.

One of my clients decided to wake up a little earlier each morning to find time for a new interest. Setting his alarm ahead half an hour did no good because he went right back to sleep. I suggested he try a leading task. He moved the alarm clock from beside his bed to the other side of his room, right in front of the bathroom door. Getting up to turn off the alarm put him very close to the bathroom, so it required only a bit more effort to go to the sink and brush his teeth. Having brushed his teeth, he was free to go back to sleep. He found, however, that if he could just manage to brush his teeth, he was up to stay, because for years and years he had made it a practice never to go back to bed after brushing his teeth!

Many of the most effective leading tasks take only a moment or two. We all know that there is often a very definite connection between clenching one's jaw and being determined; between leaning forward in a chair and being alert; between taking a deep breath and relaxing. When you act to place yourself within these patterns you can lead yourself on in the direction you want to go. Many of us do this without even thinking about it. If you look directly at a speaker, you're more likely to listen to him. If you stand up and stretch during an evening's reading, you are less likely to fall asleep. Consciously look for opportunities to use these kinds of physical actions to help you do what you want, and you'll find them.

Still another useful leading task is to "select the right channel." That is: If you have nothing to say, at least turn your mind toward the outlet that you'd use if you were full of ideas. If you must type something, turn on the typewriter.

Title a page something like "I can't think of anything to type." Then pour out your soul to the typewriter—type anything that goes through your mind, anything at all. After doing this for a while, your mind may be jogged so you're ready to put a fresh piece of paper in the typewriter and start typing something connected with the A-1.

If you need to dictate, turn on your dictation machine and *keep it on* even if you don't have anything to say. Gradually, the running dictation belt may start to pull you along, almost forcing you to find something to say. Once the words have begun to flow, you can direct them toward the A-1. If you do not turn on your dictation machine until you have precisely the "right thing" to say, you may never get started.

If you are having trouble making an important telephone call, pick up the phone and call a friend. Try to explain to your friend that it's impossible for you to pick up the phone, dial the numbers, say hello, and talk to this other person. But wait! You've just done it. If you can do it once, you can do it again and make that A-1 call.

Leading yourself toward the A-1 in this way will not always work. But I have observed many times that a simple physical action does indeed lead to meaningful involvement.

Take Advantage of Your Current Mood

One reason why people have difficulty getting involved in their A-1 is that it often requires doing something they're not emotionally prepared to do. Perhaps getting started on your A-1 means sitting quietly at your desk thinking, when what you really feel like doing is talking to someone. Now you have two options: To forget all about your decision to get started on the A-1 and talk to someone just for the sake of talking, or to take advantage of your mood by letting it carry you toward the A-1, rather than away from it.

The idea is to take your emotional need and see whether it is possible to satisfy it in some way connected with the A-1. In the example I just gave, clearly the best use of your time would be to go to talk to someone who is concerned with your A-1 and see what ideas he or she can share with you. After satisfying your need for companionship, and hopefully

getting some good ideas in the bargain, you may find it much easier to return to your desk and do the required thinking.

The reverse twist of this—leading to procrastination rather than forward movement—happens daily in most stockbrokerage offices. Many people become stockbrokers in part because of a wish to associate with (and help) other people. Rationally, this could be satisfied by calling on prospects and customers and attempting to sell stocks. This need can also be satisfied by talking to other stockbrokers. Besides, stockbrokers are handier, and known for their friendliness; prospects are more difficult to reach, and occasionally of less friendly bent.

That is why many stockbrokers use up much valuable time by selling other brokers on their views about sports, politics and women.

At times everybody likes to be left alone to shuffle papers quietly. This is a legitimate emotional need, often satisfied by processing routine paperwork, emptying the in-box, or neatening a pile of more or less useless memos. If you detect that you're avoiding your A-1 because of this need, you may be able to satisfy it and still do something for the A-1. You could arrange all your papers connected with the A-1 in alphabetical order, dot all the i's and cross all the t's, make neat lists of things to do on the A-1 (without any feeling of ever having to do them), or rewrite a memo about the A-1 even though the memo really needs no further polishing.

You might well ask me at this point, "Aren't I better off doing something worthwhile that is not connected with the A-1 rather than doing something trivial on the A-1?"

My emphatic answer to this question is "No!"

If you tell me you've been procrastinating and are not able to get involved in the A-1, do anything, regardless of importance, so long as it has *some* connection with the A-1. Once you're involved, your sense of priorities will lead you eventually to do more productive work on the A-1. But if you turn to some other activity, you've done nothing to try to halt the procrastination mechanism, and you've given yourself no chance to become involved.

Sometimes it's best to wait until your mood is right for doing something. You don't want to use up too much energy trying to force yourself to do something that you don't want to do. But often—especially if the task you have identified as

your A-1 is fairly complex and involves a number of steps—there is an excellent chance that at least one particular aspect of the project will fit your current mood. Your job is to find that soft spot.

A good question to ask yourself at this point is "What am I *willing* to do on the A-1?" You might say to yourself, "I know there are plenty of things about this A-1 that I don't feel like doing now, but is there *anything* I find interesting, or appealing, or at least tolerable?"

Find some piece of the A-1 that you're in the mood to do. Then you will be using your existing needs to lead you toward the A-1 rather than letting them lead you away from it.

Say you're writing a book. At this moment you're not interested in rewriting any of the dozen chapters that will have to be completely reworked. You *do* feel like reading the editor's comments on those chapters that are in pretty good shape, and that require little effort on your part to finish up.

Or you face a big exam. You're not quite ready to read the supplementary textbooks that the professor has assigned. But you don't mind reading over your class notes, something you know you're going to have to do anyway in the course of preparing for the test.

Give Yourself a Pep Talk

Perhaps your lack of involvement is due to a lack of motivation. In that case, taking a few minutes to build up motivation is a good investment.

Studies have shown that most people don't start a project they believe they can't finish. Conversely, most people will attempt something that appears easy even though in fact it is impossible. The basis of their willingness to try is their subjective estimate of the probability of success.

So remember: If you *feel* that something will be difficult or impossible, the odds are that you'll not be as likely to try it as if you feel it is easy. But keep in mind that these are your feelings. They aren't necessarily facts. Since you don't for a fact know how hard something is, you'll do better to assume that it's not too difficult and that you can do it. This is much more likely to get you started on the A-1. It stands to

reason: If you think you're going to be successful, you'll work harder on getting the A-1 finished—which is why a little pep talk about positive attitude and self-confidence can motivate you to do the A-1. Just as the coach talks to the football team at halftime, you might try telling yourself:

"You can do it. So stay with it."

"Stop feeling sorry for yourself and get to work!"

"You'll never know until you try."

"We don't want any defeatists around here."

These slogans will help fight discouragement and negative feelings.

Your pep talk might also include a listing of the benefits (see Learn to Stress the Benefits, Chapter 20) that you'll reap from getting the A-1 done, and yes, the consequences that face you if you fail to do it now. (See The Real Price Of Delay, Chapter 19).

Make a Commitment to Someone

You tell yourself, "I'll spend an hour on this in the afternoon," but the time comes and goes and you work on other matters. But if you have actually made an appointment with someone else to discuss the subject, you're likely to keep the appointment and get the subject discussed, because you've made a commitment to someone and don't want to let that person down. I find that some clients use an appointment with me as the stimulus to get going on some A-1 they feel is important. They don't want to let me down, and they don't want to waste the fee they're paying me. They've made a commitment in self-esteem and money, and these are powerful stimuli indeed.

What can you promise, and who is a good promisee? Well, you can promise your husband to get the garden in shape in time for the backyard barbecue he has arranged; promise your wife, as she leaves for the office in the morning, that you'll make a soufflé for dinner tonight; promise your boss that you'll have the proposal ready for his review on his return from his Toledo trip. Usually this kind of promise activates your conscience sufficiently to get the A-1 done.

A deadline, though often unpleasant, also seems to force action. A promise to meet a deadline rather than do it "later"

is a good inducement. If friends invite you to "get together sometime" you may well want to leave things deliberately vague. But if you really enjoy their company, don't let them get away without setting a definite time for getting together.

A meeting is a special kind of deadline. A commitment to be a particular place at a specific time to discuss a particular subject goes a long way to get a task moving. Your unwillingness to be totally unprepared at the meeting forces your hand. You do some preparation, and this represents more involvement than you've mustered up to now.

Meetings are one of the greatest time-wasters ever invented. They are almost always inefficient. Much of what is said at meetings is irrelevant or redundant. Little is to the point. But what do you expect? If the guy who called the meeting knew all the answers, or could just go ahead and do what needed doing, he wouldn't have called the meeting in the first place.

Most meetings come about because someone cannot do the A-1 easily or by himself. Rather than leaving important problems totally unattended to, the executive committee of the Supergiant Corporation of the membership committee of the YMCA gets everyone together and at least gets someone thinking about the A-1 problem. It might be an instant task to call a meeting, but it's hardly an instant task to attend it. As I've shown, you can usually do a lot better yourself.

16. TRY STIMULUS CHANGE TO KEEP INVOLVED

ONCE YOU GET INVOLVED, many tasks keep you involved until the end. You may put off cleaning up after a dinner party for several hours, but once you *do* begin—washing the dishes, cleaning the ashtrays, vacuuming the rug—you persevere until the job is done. Or, having put aside a couple of hours of quiet time, you spread across your desk all the hotel, airline, and rent-a-car receipts from a long business trip and keep at it until you have filled out all the necessary expense account forms so your office will reimburse you.

Most tasks are sufficiently short or compelling so that even if you must put them aside and come back to them later, your initial involvement carries you quickly back to the heart of the project, just as a good book pulls at you again and again until you have read the last page.

At other times you work on a task for a while, but you run out of steam short of your goal. Perhaps you've been sitting at your desk working on the proposal for a new television documentary for an hour and a half, and can't come up with another decent idea. Or you've been addressing envelopes for a charity benefit; you have to finish by 5 P.M. but halfway through you just can't stand to look at another zip code.

You know that the best use of your time is to continue with the A-1. You have told yourself that this is no time for procrastination. You managed to get involved. You built up quite a bit of momentum. But now you're bogged down. How you can possibly stay involved any longer?

One answer is: Always set a next step. Quite frequently, a project will bog down for lack of planning the very next step. Whenever you are working your way through a project, make clear what the next step is. Then set a time to check whether you've completed that step.

No Need to Become Bored

It's not at all surprising that you should become bored, restless, or fatigued after working on the same task for some time. The yearning for change is natural. Variety is not merely "the spice of life"; it's an essential ingredient.

Various experiments have been carried out in which an individual is placed in a room with a strictly controlled environment. His responses are monitored. In one of these experiments the subject lies on a comfortable bed in total darkness most of the time. All his physical needs are cared for. He pushes a button and finds a hot meal behind a sliding panel. After five days of this, most of the test subjects reported hysteria, fantasies, and delusions. No subject was able to continue for more than a week, and all took many months to recuperate fully. Such experiments confirm that in the absence of what is called "stimulus change" a person undergoes rapid psychological deterioration.

If stimulus change is a fundamental human need, this need may go back to the way our ancestors lived. The caveman's life depended on his ability to detect and respond to change. A shift in the scent carried on the wind alerted him to the presence of food and the danger of predatory animals. Survival of the fittest favored those who were most sensitive to stimulus change. Modern man has inherited this biological radar.

But if it once was a matter of life and death to be aware of a sound of the advancing mammoth's footsteps, today it is generally annoying and distracting to be turned into the noise of strangers walking down the hall, other people's telephones ringing, and cars passing by.

Potentially distracting stimuli are always around although when you're very much engrossed in something, you may not notice them or can ignore them. Constructive stimuli sometimes need an invitation.

Normally your need for stimulus change is satisfied by the evolution of the current task as one step leads to another. The natural evolution of a project generates many possible tasks. Keeping a To Do List gives you a choice of tasks to provide stimulus change. It even pays occasionally to take

time to list additional steps you might take on the A-1 just so you have a broader range of activities to draw upon.

It's when the current task does not provide variety and change of pace that you grow restless or bored and eagerly accept distraction or create it for yourself. Is there any alternative to procrastination at this point?

Suppressing your need for change is very unlikely to be a satisfactory way of staying involved in the A-1 when you feel like you've had enough; you can't change the biologically instilled need for stimulus change. If you're going to get control of your actions, your opportunity comes in providing the *right* stimulus change.

Rest Breaks and Work Breaks

One thing you can do is take a rest break. Get up and stretch, walk to the water cooler, socialize, then continue on the A-1 for another hour or two.

You can also take a work break. Any other task will do, but another A is always preferable if it will mean a change of pace from the work you were just involved in. If you've been addressing envelopes, make an appointment with your hairdresser, go over your dinner menu, wash the breakfast dishes, or visit with the woman next door. Then, after a few minutes, go back and continue the A-1.

Often the break is all you need. But what do you do if you're working against a deadline and every minute counts? Or if you tried a coffee break ten minutes ago and you're already becoming restive again? You might leave the A-1 for a while, but is that wise? Won't you have the same problem of reinvolvement when you try to return to it later?

You really want to stick to it, but how?

The answer lies in satisfying your need for stimulus change *within* the scope of the A-1.

Tasks that you find dull and repetitive can—with some imagination—be made more interesting. Even if you're sending out Christmas cards, sewing name tapes on camp clothes, or coding inventory sheets, if you look you will find ways to vary such tasks and satisfy your need for stimulus change without running away to some other activity.

The real payoff in using this technique comes when you're

having trouble staying involved in a multifaceted project, like writing a magazine article, developing a study proposal for the League of Women Voters, figuring out how to respond to a competitor's new product, or researching ways to recycle used plasterboard. To keep from procrastinating when you get bogged down in a swampy part of the forest, you need to get hooked on some new aspect of the project. You need fresh bait for fresh involvement.

As I showed in the section on instant tasks, there are many ways to move your project ahead. You can plan, talk to others, give yourself a pep talk, gather information, write down some notes. Naturally, some projects have more built-in variety than others. But there are always at least *some* opportunities for change within each project.

Try changing your location. Sometimes new surroundings can do wonders to refresh a tired mind. If you've been working at your desk, try the conference room. If you've been reading in the living room, try the bedroom. Or stay where you are but change your position. If you have been sitting down, try standing on your head.

What works best is to change the way you're going about the task. Any intellectual effort contains elements that can be juggled. You need information and ideas. These have to be collected, digested, and acted upon. You can shift back and forth between working on information and ideas, or switch from collecting to digesting to action.

Not Enough Information—or Too Much?

Let's begin with information collection. Earlier I discussed the idea of getting more information as a way to get involved. You will recall that the level of your interest generally increases as you move from no information to some information. So when you need to keep involved in a project, pick an area where you have little or no information and increase your knowledge.

But suppose your problem is the very opposite. Many people get bogged down in the middle of a project because they have so much information that they feel overwhelmed. Or they have too many ideas (even too many good ones). There is an optimum level of knowledge of course (it varies

for different projects and for different people). Either too much or too little leads to a decrease in interest and involvement.

So if you are tired of collecting information or ideas, process what you have. Consider each item; then file it, condense it, throw it out, organize it. A particularly helpful step, if you've been gathering knowledge from books or other people or your own head, is to write something down. Even if it is no good for final use, it gives you something fresh to react to, or to show others to get their reactions.

The Cushion That Never Got Made

Ms. Gill had long wanted to make a needlepoint cushion for a favorite chair. She kept putting it off, because there seemed to be so many details to work out before she could even begin to think of putting needle to canvas. Finally, wisely realizing she would have to start somewhere if she was going to get on with it, she went shopping for materials. She spent several weeks looking for the perfect pattern and yarns. A saleslady at one store talked her into taking a month-long intensive course on the history and technology of needlepoint. Having completed the course, she decided that the only way to have yarns of the precise colors she wanted was to get them from a mail-order house. This led to a six-week delay while she inquired about samples, received some, asked for more, received those, and finally made her choice.

Then, having assembled her materials, she realized she did not have the right place to work on her needlepoint project. So she decided to fix up the spare room, change the lighting fixtures, clean out the accumulation of old junk, etc. Another month went by. Then she asked her husband to make her a special box for her supplies, since she did not like any of the types she saw in the stores. Another two-week delay. When at long last she had taken care of every conceivable detail, eliminated all risk of error or inconvenience, and laid everything out in great orderliness, she had become so sick of the whole thing that she thought she had best delay a while before starting.

The moral of the story is: You can become so carried away with preparatory steps that you beat any project to death. I said before that *any* task is acceptable as a stimulus

change so long as it bears some relation to the Overwhelming A-1. But it must also be relatively short and easy. It must lead you toward the completion of the A-1. If Ms. Gill's A-1 was to turn loose her curiosity about needlepoint and follow wherever it led, then she accomplished her A-1 in fine style. But if it was to make a new cushion for her chair, then she certainly went astray.

Any major project, such as adding a new wing to your house, or introducing an important new procedure in your office, is a prolonged effort that requires continuing involvement at many stages. This takes large blocks of time.

First schedule the time needed to work on the project: Then when the time comes use the ideas in this chapter to keep involved.

17. SOMETIMES IT PAYS TO SLOW DOWN

IN SOME SITUATIONS, such techniques as instant tasks and stimulus change will not halt procrastination, because you harbor a too-active dislike or distaste for the A-1. Talking to your child's teacher about a bad grade, seeing the doctor for an annual checkup, asking the bank for a loan, drawing up a new will, going for a job interview—these are all examples of important but unpleasant tasks that many people put off. You probably include them when you plan, and underscore their importance by assigning them an A-priority. But when the time comes to follow through, the task looms up larger than life in all its unpleasantness, and you hastily turn to some other activity instead.

A decision to turn from an unpleasant A-1 to a more pleasant task gets far less time and rational consideration than it deserves. Typically, such a decision is made quickly, often in a matter of a few seconds.

Suppose you take out a letter you should answer now. Writing a reply is your A-1, but since it involves admitting an embarrassing mistake you find the task distasteful. You lay the letter aside for the third time this week and pick up a magazine instead. Soon you're absorbed in an interesting article, and have forgotten all about the unpleasant letter. The sequence of steps that led to your procrastinating on the A-1 took no more than fifteen seconds.

Let's back up and look at that decision more closely. You already had a clearly identified A-1. The next step was to do it. But you hesitated. In essence, you had two choices at this point. You could:

- (1) do the A-1, thereby making the best use of your time;
- (2) do something else, thereby wasting your time.

True, you got *some* value out of the activity you turned to instead of the A-1, but since the A-1 was the best use of your time, the other activity was a comparative waste of time.

What can you do when you have no doubt that you should do the unpleasant A-1, yet are strongly inclined to run away from it and turn to something else?

First, you must recognize clearly when you have reached such a pivotal point. You're at Decision Time when you're at the point of choosing whether to do the A-1 now or to avoid it. It is somewhat like being at the top of a mountain. There are two paths leading down the mountain, one to the north and one to the south. Once you take a few steps you will be on your way down one side of the mountain. But for the moment you are poised at the top, uncommitted.

Once you realize you're at Decision Time, you'll want to take control of the decisionmaking process. The way to do this is to *slow down* the final decision. A quick decision to put the unpleasant A-1 out of sight and mind gives you little chance to curb your tendency to procrastinate. Take enough time to consider the situation carefully. Give yourself every opportunity *not* to ditch the A-1 for some activity of lesser value. Slow down the process so that you have time to make a conscious and deliberate choice.

Take the case of the unanswered letter. When you catch yourself putting the letter aside, slow your hand down. If you take a full minute to put the letter away, instead of the second or two you would normally take, you'll be forced to confront your thoughts about the letter. You'll have enough time to review why you've been putting the letter aside, and try to come up with a better way to solve your dilemma than by procrastination.

Have you ever done anything you didn't like? Of course you have. Everyone has. In childhood your parents insisted that you go to bed at 7:30 P.M., even though it was summer vacation and the older kids were still outside playing Hide-and-Seek. On April 15 you mailed your income-tax check to Uncle Sam, even though you would rather have used the money to buy a four-track stereo for the den. You studied for an exam coming up in a subject you loathe. The list is endless.

Even as you do something you don't like, you have a choice. You can do it grudgingly or, having decided to do it now, you can do it cheerfully. Why make yourself miserable? Once you've decided to do a task, you may as well do the best you can and try to enjoy yourself.

If you sense you're about to avoid the A-1 and do something else instead, tell yourself quite emphatically that you're at Decision Time. Remind yourself what an important time it is. Caution yourself to slow down. Now use these three ways to help you overcome your distaste for the A-1:

- (1) *Deal with the unpleasantness directly.*
- (2) *Recognize the greater unpleasantness that results from delay.*
- (3) *Create enthusiasm that counterbalances the unpleasantness.*

I'll deal with each of these in detail. Once you have all three in your toolkit, you can use whichever seems most appropriate to give you the extra push you need at Decision Time for doing the A-1 now.

18. DON'T LET FEAR GET IN YOUR WAY

How MANY TIMES have you avoided doing something important because you were afraid of making a mistake? Or getting angry? Or feeling guilty? Or hurting yourself or others? Or being rejected? Or taking on too much responsibility? Or confronting the unknown? Lots of times, I'm sure.

I'm not a psychiatrist, so it would be presumptuous of me to make any diagnosis, especially at long distance, of anyone's particular emotional hang-up. The techniques I discuss in this chapter work in a bypass fashion; they are not intended to cure anyone of any particular emotional problem, but to allow him to function while he either works his problem out himself or gets professional help.

I'll deal primarily with fear, because my conversations with psychiatrists and psychologists have convinced me that fear is at the root of all avoidance. If you can conquer your fear, you can do that unpleasant A-1.

I have encountered many cases of people avoiding a task to which they have assigned a high priority because subconsciously they feared the consequences that would follow once the task was completed.

The sales executive mentioned earlier kept procrastinating on his A-1 of trying to sell a new account because of his fear of adding further to his workload if he were successful. His fear needed to be allayed by clearing away some of his other work; only then did he stop avoiding his high-priority A and go after that big account.

A supervisor was asked to develop a procedure manual for a job that he had always personally directed. His boss made it very clear that the manual had a higher priority than anything else. Again and again the supervisor put the task at the head of his To Do List, yet he did nothing about working on the manual. Finally he realized he was procrastinating out of fear that if he finished the procedure manual, he might even-

tually be out of a job. He would no longer be indispensable. His real A-1 was a talk with his boss to clarify what his status would be once the job on the manual was done.

Don't let your emotions do you in. If you suspect you are avoiding the A-1 because of some fear, then at Decision Time ask yourself, "What am I afraid of?" Make a list of possibilities and single out the fear that is most likely causing the avoidance. Then confront that fear head on. How? Take the case of Mr. Blue.

Mr. Blue was a sales representative for an industrial-products firm. He knew that the best use of his time was to develop contacts with as many new purchasing agents as possible. Nevertheless, he always stretched out his visits to those agents who were old friends, even though many of them could repay him only in talk and not in profit. He avoided making calls on new agents, because they occasionally rejected him or treated him rudely.

Now Mr. Blue had prepared an annual sales plan. It rightly emphasized new agent contacts, but from the very first day he tried to implement the plan, he found himself running away. His fear of feeling rejected was clearly preventing him from following through on his wonderful plan.

Determined to find some solution to his dilemma, Mr. Blue decided to focus on one particular goal—to see the purchasing agent from the Ajax Company. He'd long wanted to go after the Ajax account. The chance of actually closing this sale was truly exciting. But he was scared that the agent might turn him down with some devastating comment, and then he would be worse off than before.

How to Extinguish Fear

As he contemplated the telephone call to the Ajax agent and felt fear holding him back, Mr. Blue told himself that being afraid was silly; that there was nothing to worry about; that he had more important things to do than worrying. In effect, he said to his fear, "Go away, you're bothering me." This had often helped him over the hump he confronted before making a call to a new agent, but since he had particularly strong feelings about this agent, his pep talk was not a sufficient antidote.

If Mr. Blue's fear had been at a low-enough level—of campfire rather than forest fire proportions—then it could probably have been easily extinguished. But with an out-of-control fear, a really threatening emotion, such a solution rarely works. Indeed Mr. Blue's current predicament was such that when he told himself, "There's nothing to fear," it only made matters worse. Not only was he afraid; he was afraid that he was afraid when he shouldn't be afraid! He certainly had to find some other way of handling his fear of being rejected by the Ajax agent.

How to Contain Fear

A small fire can easily be put out with a little water, but if a fire is raging uncontrollably, it's best to contain it, to create boundaries and then in effect say to the fire, "You can burn all you want inside this circle, but you may not cross this line!"

Mr. Blue found that although he could not extinguish his fear, he was able to contain it, at least for the moment. He realized that he might not even get to talk to the feared agent, but only to his secretary. Anyway, he thought he'd be able to survive a quick, clean "No" over the telephone. If he did succeed in making an appointment, there would be plenty to worry about, so he would give himself lots of time to indulge his fears—but only after he made the call.

At this point Mr. Blue recalled the character Major Major in the novel *Catch-22*, who announced that he was not to be disturbed when he was in, and that visitors were to be shown into his office only when he was out. Mr. Blue wasted a few more seconds daydreaming about how nice it would be if new agents were never in when he called. Then he came back to reality, hoped that the man would not be in, and dialed the number.

It turned out that the Ajax agent was in, and could see Mr. Blue the following Monday at 2:30 P.M., four days away.

At first the exhilaration that came from actually having gotten the appointment kept Mr. Blue busy all afternoon, lining up other appointments with new agents.

But the next morning, when he should have been collecting data and assembling material for the Ajax presentation, Mr.

Blue found himself procrastinating once more. He kept turning to other, far less important matters, and in between he fretted about the grueling questions the agent would ask. As his fear of failure gathered momentum, he envisioned himself appearing foolish and ill-prepared. When he could stand his painful imaginings no longer, he escaped to the coffee machine down the hall.

How to "Judo" Your Fear

At this point Mr. Blue could neither extinguish his fear nor contain it; he had to face the situation head on. As he returned to his desk he recalled another strategy he could resort to—using judo to throw his fear. The idea behind judo, he knew, is to use your opponent's own strength and weight against him, thereby turning potential defeat into victory. Mr. Blue's fear was coming at him with great force and effect. He would have to throw that fear by using its force to his advantage, rather than letting it do him in.

As he sat down at his desk his inner dialogue went something like this:

FEAR: "I am going to make a fool of myself. I really don't know much about the Ajax Company or how they can best use my products . . ."

JUDO: ". . . if that's the case, then I better put some time into finding out more about Ajax right away."

FEAR: "Then there are all those questions I know he'll ask . . ."

JUDO: ". . . and instead of worrying about being ill-prepared, I had better try to anticipate his questions and dig up the answers right now."

With his energy more positively channeled, Mr. Blue gulped down the last of his coffee and started to research the Ajax account. Everytime something unpleasant about the upcoming interview occurred to him, he "judoed" it. When he thought of a terrible mistake he might make, he made a mental note not to let *that* happen. His fear actually spurred him on, since he realized that only conscientious work might save him. There was no procrastinating the rest of Friday; he wanted to be sure he was prepared.

Monday afternoon, on the way over to the Ajax Company,

he started worrying again. By the time he entered the building he was shaking all over. All his efforts on Friday would be wasted if his fear kept him from being able to think straight.

Ballooning Your Fears

At this point Mr. Blue's fear could not be dealt with by any of the strategies I have discussed so far. After all, this was it! If ever there was a good time to be afraid, it was now. Mr. Blue realized that his only chance was to give in to his fears completely and hope that they would burn themselves out before it was too late.

As he got into the elevator, he asked himself, "What's the worst thing that could possibly happen to me as a result of this visit?" Perhaps the agent would call his boss and tell him that Mr. Blue was incompetent. Perhaps he would tell all his friends Mr. Blue was an idiot and they should never do business with him.

Getting warmed up, Mr. Blue began to balloon his fears even more. His fantasies were easily the equal of Walter Mitty's. Perhaps the agent would organize a boycott of Mr. Blue's products. Perhaps the agent would start a smear campaign against him and he would be spurned everywhere by everyone. With no safe territory left, Mr. Blue pictured that he would withdraw to a storage closet and starve to death, uncared for, completely and finally rejected.

Mr. Blue got off the elevator, walked slowly down the corridor, and was outside the agent's door when he realized that his fears had carried him into complete absurdity. The balloon burst. The situation could not possibly be as terrible as he had imagined. Having envisioned himself at the point of death, he had nowhere to go but up. With a last nervous shake, he opened the door.

In fact, nothing terrible happened. The agent was in, welcomed Mr. Blue warmly, thanked him for coming over, and inquired why Mr. Blue had not come in to see him sooner. He listened attentively as Mr. Blue delivered his well-prepared presentation, said he was certainly interested and then and there gave him a small order as a starter. Mr. Blue left his office and breathed a great sigh of relief.

In time, partly because of the confidence that comes from successes, but also because he survived the occasional inevitable rejections intact, he began to look forward to encounters with new agents as a way of testing himself and reaffirming his inner strength. He gradually came to disassociate his sense of worth as a person from the role he played as a salesman. The agents who turned him down were not rejecting him, they were rejecting his product. This change in attitude did not happen right away; in fact, it took Mr. Blue two years to reduce his fear of rejection to an occasional twinge.

I should point out that Mr. Blue has behaved as all good examples in books behave—he has managed to exhibit a number of problems in dealing with fear, and he has benefited from all the techniques I suggested using.

I wouldn't expect you to do as well the very first time you try to conquer fears you've built up over the years. But the next time you suspect that some fear is causing you to procrastinate on a A-1, try extinguishing, containing, judoing, and ballooning that fear until it is afraid to show itself ever again.