

Small Steps Will Get You There

6/8/23

Lisa here. I hope you enjoyed last week's blog about task initiation. Today we're doing a deeper dive on something that often makes task initiation difficult- overwhelm. Do some tasks feel too daunting or overwhelming to even start? This is a common reason for procrastination and for deciding not to do a task at all.

So, what do you do when faced with a daunting task? It may sound obvious, but breaking a big, overwhelming task into smaller, more doable chunks is key. I'm sure you've heard this before, but it's often unclear *how* to go about this. If you break the task into too many steps, you may feel discouraged and like you're not making progress. Too few steps and you still feel overwhelmed.



Here are some tips you can use to break down tasks into small, specific goals no matter what kind of task you're facing, whether it's a project at work or a household chore:

- Decide what kind of goals you will create for yourself. It's important to know how you work best so that you create smaller goals that you will actually be willing to complete.
 - Some people do well with time-based goals (e.g., I'll work on putting away my clean clothes for 15 minutes now and for 15 minutes after dinner).
 - Others do well with output-based goals (e.g., I'll fold clean laundry today, put away the folded laundry tomorrow, and match socks the next day).
- Decide the time frame for each step. You may need to work backward from a due date or you may break down the task and then decide when you will complete each step.
- Figure out what will keep you accountable. Some tasks have built-in accountability. If you have a project due for work or if you're planning a family event, you know people will be counting on you. For other tasks, you'll need to make your own accountability. You might get your family members involved or ask a friend to check in with you to see if you're making progress.



Using the strategies I've just described has another benefit. Focusing on completing small steps shifts your view from completion of the ultimate goal as the only metric of success. Instead, you can appreciate your progress and experience small victories along the way. When you view your progress as success, you build momentum to keep going until the task is complete. Again, this works for big projects and mundane, everyday chores.

This strategy is also a great one to model for and teach your kids. Not only will they learn to appreciate the journey as well as the destination, they will also learn some important skills. They'll learn how to plan and organize their approach to a task, how to initiate and complete a task, and how to problem-solve and make adjustments when things do not go according to their original plan. That's some excellent executive functioning skills training!