

# Tina's Musings

## -GETTING ONESELF TO DO HARD STUFF-

**You know how you've been meaning to do this thing for a while. It's not even that big a deal. Anyone else would have done it easily. Actually it may be something you really need to do, know you should, want to – in a way. But don't. Just can't, it seems.**

Below is a list of strategies I have accumulated over the years. Please feel free to add to the list, make comments and to give feedback on what works.

**Dayenu/Successive Approximation.** "Dayenu" in Hebrew means "that will suffice" (translated to the future tense) "that will suffice." In psychological terminology, this approach is called "successive approximation". It means that if you have something hard to do, take the tiniest step in that direction and give yourself a slap on the back for doing it - doing something physical like that is actually important - even if that's only as far as you get.

### Dr. Tina's Aside

When I first moved to Austin, I was by myself. I didn't really know anyone. So, I felt invisible and vulnerable. That made it hard for me to push myself to attend any kind of social function where I might meet people. So, I'd instruct myself to choose what I would wear if I were to go. A big cheer for myself later - really! - I acknowledge "Dayenu" this is good enough for now; I can stop here." If I felt I could get dressed, I would, but if that was only as far as I got, Dayenu, pat on the back.....It will at least get you moving. At some point, it will get you there.

**Reward** - Simply enough, if I actually work on this for an hour I'll go buy that thing I wanted. Or, on a larger scale, "if I work on this for 3 months, I'll whisk myself off to Tahiti". Don't turn the rewarding over for anyone else to judge. You know if you deserve the reward. Be fair - in both directions.

**With someone else** - Having an exercise partner, makes it much easier to get going. If someone else is waiting for you, expecting you, counting on you, you are more likely to do it. (I wonder if this is more of a female thing.) With a partner, you have someone to talk to and to share the experience with.

### Dr. Tina's Aside

My walking regime began a number of years ago when Bill's college friend came to town with his new wife who was older than we were - a grandmother, actually - and the 3 of them went bike riding. I didn't feel fit enough to keep up. So, I went to my friend Joanne's house and told her we were going to start walking on a regular basis. And we did. I knew I couldn't do it on my own. So, having someone to do it with along with the shame and humiliation I felt got me going. Obviously, **shame** and **humiliation** along with **desperation** can also get us to do hard stuff - and sometimes it has to come down to that - but don't start there if you don't have to.

**Minimizing its importance** - For some reason, you've made doing this thing pretty intense. You may be using it as proof of something - how smart or dumb you are, whether or not you are as clever as you thought. So, finding a way to minimize the whole thing can be helpful. Yes - you can fool yourself!

Writing an idea about it on a scrap of paper, for example. "I just can't write this paper," you might think. "I don't think I really know what I'm doing. Well, I've got one idea; I'll just put it on this napkin."

Or you might use your all-too-natural negativity "I'm going to quit any way, what difference does it make how good this is". "I'm going to drop out of this program anyway; it doesn't matter what they think." (This is how I got through the first year of graduate school).

**For just a short time** - You can do anything for 30 minutes or 3 hours or one day.

**Do it along with something else you like** – typing; getting dressed up; sitting outside; eating popcorn; with music on; with some hot tea.

**Agenderize** – Choose the day, time and amount of time you are going to devote to it – specifically – Saturday at 1:00 for an hour. **Show up** – whether you actually do anything or not. Commit the time and honor the commitment. Even if you don't do it, you at least sit with it. Don't make it too long. The idea is to be successful at keeping the agreement with yourself.

**Set up consequences in case you don't do it** – Have others expecting you to be there; to have accomplished it; to perform it. Deadlines are good. Talk to your Inner Child – “You don't get to go/buy that/wear that unless you do it.”

**Do something/anything - rather than nothing** (though nothing is okay for a little bit). If you are sitting around, sleeping, watching TV just to avoid, then this can be a good place to start. Get up and put clothes in the dryer or brush your teeth or take in the mail. The idea is to stop the escape behavior. There are certainly times when doing nothing is the right thing to do. But you'll know when it's too much.

**Do it so as to avoid doing something else more odious** – One way to get your house clean is to see it as a productive way of avoiding having to do something more overwhelming. Vacuum your floors instead of doing your taxes for now. Of course, do your taxes eventually.

**Do it as a solution to another problem** – Walk to the pharmacy in order to pick up the prescription. Go to the uncomfortable social event by way of getting a free meal.

#### Dr. Tina's Aside

I needed to do weight bearing exercises; you know, lifting those little barbells to fight off swinging upper arm syndrome. Nothing was working. My friend gave me some small hand held weights. I couldn't get myself to touch them. I tried putting them by the TV. “What a good use of time,” I thought. But I never touched them. Then I found myself waiting by the answering machine for the “voice” to go through his thing. I was bored. I didn't like just standing there. I know, I can lift those weights. Yes!

**Use your obsessive tendencies where possible** – Obsessive and compulsive tendencies can drive both you and those around you nuts. But it can also very useful for routinely engaging in positive habits. We used to laugh in my family about how my father would go down to the basement every day and walk a certain number of rotations around the ping pong table for exercise. As I am now turning into my father in certain ways, I find that I **must** walk 40 minutes a day. It turns out to be just easier to know that – like brushing teeth – it's not a decision, there's no conflict. I just do it. Bill likes to achieve a certain number of miles on his bike over a certain period of time. Pedometers are good that way too.

**Use positive self-talk** – I'm all for talking positive self-talk out loud where possible. You won't look any weirder than people talking on invisible phones. This is do be done along with physical kudos like pats on the back or self-hugs – goofy as it sounds. What is even more important is to **minimize the negative self-talk, catastrophic thinking and gloomy images**. I'm all too good at catastrophic images. I tried making myself come up with a positive image for every negative one I catch myself in. Very hard to do, despite having many in my life. We're just programmed to scan for danger.

**Move away from all self-talk** for a while. Meditation and mindfulness – the practice of focusing on being in the moment – allow us to be aware of the fleeting nature of thoughts, recriminations and anxious anticipations. Either of those help quiet our mind, let go of overreactions for a little while and gain some perspective.

**Figure out what gets you to do the stuff you do act on** – If you realize, for example, that you are more likely to do something **if it is for someone else**, use that information in getting yourself moving now. If you are someone who likes to **be competitive**, use that. If you're a **nature lover**, do it outdoors. There are many ways you can use who you are to get yourself to do difficult tasks.

**Figure out what gets in your way. Honor that.** Get clear on what is making you anxious – failing, looking stupid, finding out you have no creativity, being rejected – those are the usual. Make it easier for yourself, considering that; with any of the above or any other way you can minimize your fear and optimize your success. Have compassion for yourself but still do what you need to do.

All of the above involve **making a deal with yourself** – to do what you feel is right or necessary or nice. **You want your steps to be do-able** (even shoo-ins at first). And you want to **be sure and follow through**. **The goal is both to succeed and to keep your promise to yourself.**