
Action vs. Delay

“Whatever you think you can do or believe you can do, begin it. Action has magic, grace and power in it.” - Goethe

Action or the very act of "getting into motion" is extremely powerful and is the catalyst used in coaching to create change. For many people even though they KNOW what they want, taking steps towards it can be difficult.

The action is the foundation needed to create change in our lives and move forward to achieve our goals. We can spend our entire lives dreaming, thinking, planning and preparing to accomplish our goals, but without action, those goals and dreams will never be attained. By taking action, we create a movement that is necessary to make things happen.

Delay works in opposition to action. If we look at the action as an accelerating force that moves or pulls us forward, we can also look at the delay as an accelerating force that pulls us back and keeps us stuck. There are many factors that feed each of these forces.

A Native American elder once described his own inner struggles to a friend.

"Inside of me, there are two dogs.

The Bad dog is mean and angry.

The Good dog is good and kind.

The Bad dog fights the Good dog all day."

When asked by the friend which dog wins, the elder reflected for a moment and replied, "The one I feed the most."

Just as in this story the Bad dog fights the Good dog, delay opposes or "fights" action. The better we can manage the decelerating force of delay, the more acceleration and momentum we will experience in moving forward.

Self Application

To some, being in action all the time is just not natural or even possible. Being in action doesn't only mean running marathons, mountain climbing, acquiring businesses, and finding a partner. A small thought can create a huge shift which in turn can change your whole life. Reading, thinking, meditating, reflecting, writing, talking, coaching, walking, mentoring are actions that create forward movement. All of these steps require us to desire to be open to moving forward. This is action.

The action is oftentimes confused with the achievement of a goal or the outcome of a goal. The momentous achievements listed above (marathons, mountain climbing, etc.) are not one action step, but rather an accumulation of action steps. You don't win a marathon by waking up and going to the track and winning. It takes vision, planning and training. When a person is not in action, he/she may focus on the outcome rather than the starting point. The outcome or result could appear to be so overwhelming, that it becomes easiest to delay that first action step.

We live in times of immediacy. We want success now. The action is the process toward a successful outcome, but it is not immediate. It is a process that builds upon itself and by entering the process, you are in action. The process is fundamental to the achievement of the goal. The action is the path to growth, learning, self-esteem and confidence.

The action is a certainty. Delay is fear, worry, stress and uncertainty.

So what causes a delay? If we know that action creates the results that we desire, why delay things? It's not uncommon to get stuck when fear, limiting beliefs, commitments, judgments or Underlying Beliefs (UB's) are greater than the motivation to move forward in action.

Fear prevents us from moving forward. Fear may stem from failure, making mistakes, fearing success or change. Fear is paralyzing, allowing no flexibility or flowing movement. Fear can make us cold, rigid and static.

Limiting beliefs/Judgments can hold us back from being in action. For example, we may believe that we don't deserve to achieve a particular goal; that we are not smart enough; or financial gain from success is bad. These beliefs or judgments keep us from moving forward. To move forward we first need to understand what our beliefs are. How do our beliefs impact the way we think and believe?

Commitment is a key component to moving forward. Simply put, if we are not committed to taking action, then we just won't do it. You know that familiar story of "Tomorrow I am going to join the gym." Yet it never happens. If we are not committed to joining the gym then we won't take the necessary first step. Tomorrow comes and we put off joining the gym for another day.

Underlying beliefs and behavioural patterns hinder us from taking action. These beliefs and behaviours are so automatic and subconscious that we may not be aware of them. For example, an underlying belief might be to be unsuccessful; to not become responsible or "blamed" for something, or to avoid "failing" at something and therefore delaying that first step is comforting and may even be perceived as the best path to take. Journaling about underlying beliefs or behaviour patterns can move us forward.

Recognizing Delay

Delay can manifest in many forms. We are very creative in the excuses that we make to ourselves to justify delaying action. Delay is a form of procrastination, which means putting things off until we can put them off no longer. When we procrastinate, we are in delay mode and may even become reactive, rather than being proactive which can impact the quality of a completed task or goal.

Taking Action – The First Step

Edward de Bono refers to taking action as "operacy". He describes operacy as the skills of doing, which are an important aim for moving forward and developing. The practical skills gained in the process of developing a new idea (a strategy for action), developing a plan of

how to implement the idea and then implementing that as an action step, are important life skills. Operacy is the learning involved as we move through the process of creative thinking, developing action plans, implementing these plans and reviewing the effects of the actions. This process keeps us on the move.

Daily Renewal Practice

Create a daily renewal practice that energizes you, connects you with your goals and motivates you to take action. For some of us, this may take the form of meditation. Others may choose to go for a walk, swim, run or other forms of solitary exercise. Some people may choose to write in a journal. This daily renewal practice can take any form, as long as it inspires you to move forward.

Reflection

1. What areas of your life are you not taking action in at the moment and why?
2. What does it feel like when you are not taking action?
3. What steps did you take to achieve a goal and can you apply these steps to moving forward towards another goal?

Coaching Application

Techniques for Managing Delay

Action leads to results. But just knowing this isn't enough. Knowing it and doing it are two very different things. Taking action is not always easy. Most people know what they need to do but not acting on that knowledge prevents them from accomplishing their ambitions.

Address Fears

If we want to make changes in our lives, we have to face fear. The only way around fear is to move through it. Examine the underlying fears and help the client create an Empowering Perspective. Support your client to overcome fear by tackling whatever seems to stay in the way of their progress.

Address Underlying Beliefs

Is there an underlying belief sabotaging the stated goal? Is the client committed to failing? Avoiding failure? Success? Is the client trying to stay “safe” by avoiding something? Underlying beliefs that do support the client need to be discussed.

Create a Shift in Perspective

Support the client to create a new and different way of looking at a situation. You can do this by asking a question, exploring a different point of view, or creating a compelling vision.

Explore the philosophy that discomfort and fear are natural feelings associated with change. Helping our clients to recognize these feelings when they come up and perceive them as proof that change is occurring. This type of exploration will motivate the client to work through potentially uncomfortable feelings because it means that they are making progress!

Here are a few ideas to help support your client to create a shift in perception:

- What would you do if you had your courageous hat on right now?
- What could be the first step you take today to move forward?
- What do you look like when you are in action?

In coaching, sometimes the only thing a client needs is to take action. The action itself has power in it. That power is two-fold. We already know that nothing happens without action. That in and of itself makes action extremely powerful. But action also has the power to create momentum and motivate us to keep going!

Techniques for Creating Action

Here are some techniques to help shift your client from **Delay to Action**.

Goal Setting and Specificity

Sometimes all that is missing is an inspiring goal or a pathway forward. Help paint an exciting future for the client and they may be “pulled” forward. If the client can see what major steps need to be taken, and where they need to start, it’s much easier to begin the journey.

Strategic Questioning

Asking questions and promoting thought is another way of supporting a client to move forward. Strategic questions can create movement and foster creativity. They are open-ended and can promote new thinking and lead to strategies for action. Strategic questioning can be an empowering process that guides clients through a logical sequence for turning concerns into action.

Using Tools

A tool creates a system that can support your coaching. Build your tool kit with case studies, articles, and current approaches to motivate your client to take action. Use analogies and metaphors to paint a picture to inspire your clients to take action. If your client is not moving forward, you need to understand what is causing the delay. Tools and resources can help in this regard. Motivating a client to take one small action step will give your client the confidence to take the next step and the next one after that and so on.

Reflection

1. As a coach, what are some powerful questions you could ask your client to move them forward into action?
2. What tools could you use to support your coaching around action?

Resource

de Bono, Edward, 1999, *New Thinking for the New Millenium*, Viking Publisher, UK.