



Why small steps work best

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There is nothing wrong with having a BHAG (big, hairy, audacious goal). Nor is there anything wrong with having a big vision. Thinking big can be good. Without it we don't make substantial changes in our lives, in our communities, and in our world. But when it comes to implementation, that big dream can seem almost impossible. And that is when it remains a dream, a vision, or a big goal. In order to execute on any idea, it always works best if you can break the goal down. Break it down into smaller goals and then into milestones, and then into even smaller steps.

During my coaching career, especially business and career coaching, many clients have said to me that what really helped them was identifying actions to take and then breaking them down into small steps. That helped them deal with overwhelm and even paralysis at the size of their idea. It is good to have a vision. Without a vision we would not have the internet, cell phones, Disneyworld, movies, shopping centres, aeroplanes and so on. But, we have these in our lives, because they were dreams that were implemented. And often people are a bit stumped when it comes to the implementing part. "I don't know how to start" is a common response I get when I ask someone why they have not achieved their goal yet.

To achieve any objective in life you have to take action. And you can only take action in steps. If you break the goal down into the correct steps, then implementing each step consecutively will result in the goal being achieved. These steps or what are sometimes called action steps, can be actions you can take, they can be actions you can influence or pay others to take, or they can be actions a group of people need to take. Pretty much, any goal you want to achieve, is done according to a plan, by following a series of consecutive steps which when all done, will mean the objective is achieved.

For some people it just comes naturally. They don't even have to think about it. When they envision an idea, they can quite quickly write down a set of steps to follow that will enable them to realise their idea. For other people it is not so easy. For them it is about where to start. All they see is a final outcome, which they have no idea how to go about making happen. If this is you, then there are some approaches you can follow to break your goal down into actions to take, and then break those down into small steps that can be fairly easily completed.

1. You can work backwards from the final goal or vision. Have the end goal in mind. Then ask yourself what would you need to do to get this to happen. Then what would the step before that be. And the step before that. And so you go on working backwards from the final outcome.
2. In a similar way you can work forwards. Think about what might be the first step. Then the second step. Then the next step, and so on, until you have reached the goal.
3. If you want to, and this may be the best approach the first time, just write down or brainstorm a whole lot of steps that you could take. Then once you have the steps down you can order them. You want a series of steps that when you take them in the order you have them written down, you will reach your goal.
4. You can find someone who has already achieved your goal and read about or ask them what steps they took.
5. You can get a group of people together to brainstorm what the steps need to be to reach the end goal.
6. You can research on the internet what the steps would be. There are many websites offering advice on how to do something that list the actions to take step by step. There are even YouTube videos advising you on how to do this.

Once you have written the plan with each step you need to take to achieve your goal/dream/vision you can check your plan with others to see if there are any final tweaks that will make it easier for you to reach your goal. And then you just need to follow the plan, one step after the other, until you reach your end goal. Of course, life being what it is, obstacles will come up, but when you have dealt with the obstacle, you can just go back to your plan, readjust it if necessary, and continue with the steps.

There are many benefits to breaking any task down into small steps. The first one is usually that you overcome your inertia or state of paralysis and you actually start doing something. While a goal might be big, a step is small and usually fairly easy to take. When something looks small and simple to do, we are more likely to do it. When something looks big and complicated and will take a lot of time our brain often fools us into thinking that is too hard to do. And so we don't do it because we don't want to do something we think we might fail.

If you have goals or dreams you want to achieve, and you are feeling a bit stuck and your idea remains an idea, then work on breaking the goal down into small steps that can be done. Sometimes this helps deal with procrastination as well. When something seems very difficult and overwhelming we tend to stress rather than take action. When something requires small steps that can be fairly easily done, it is much easier to get on and take those steps. Just think about the next step, not the end goal. Then think about the next step. Before you know it, you will be at the end. And your goal/dream will be reality.