

Taking Action Quick Steps

Taking action involves four basic steps (Harris, 2009):

1. Choose an area of life to take action.
2. Choose a value to guide your action.
3. Develop a SMART goal.
4. Track your action.

Step One: Choose an Area of Life for Action

Look at your Constructing Values worksheet. Choose an area of life where you want to get moving first. Maybe it's one where you aren't doing anything or not as much as you used to because you've been busy using the problem-solving approach to pain.

Step Two: Choose a Value to Guide Your Action

Select a value you want to act on in the next twenty-four hours in that chosen area of life. Write down the value in your new Matrix diagram. Remember, you write down values in the bottom right.

Step Three: Develop a SMART Goal

Now, remember the Constructing Values exercise. We discussed how values are like compass headings that give you direction and keep you on a course toward valued living, but you never get there or reach them. Goals, on the other hand, are actions you take that move you along the way. They're like the islands that you stop at and do things. You write these things down in the top right of the Matrix. When setting a goal for yourself, you'll create a SMART goal that is specific, meaningful, adaptive, realistic, and time-framed (Harris, 2009).

Specific

What exactly do you want to do physically in the world outside you?

Meaningful

Confirm that what you want to do is aligned with your value. To do this, you can ask yourself whether the following guides the action you want to take. Am I trying to move away from something painful? Am I trying to do what others want me to do? Am I trying to do what I think I'm supposed to do? Your answer to these questions is no when you take action that is aligned with a value.

Another way to check whether your values drive your actions is to pause several times daily and ask yourself, Is what I'm doing right now in this situation moving me in the direction I want to go in life? You won't need to answer it with words. You'll know because of what you're doing and how you're feeling. Living your values tends to generate pleasant feelings that let you know you're hitting the target.

Adaptive

Is what you want to do a step that moves you in the direction of your value? A goal is not what you'll never do again. For example, you watch television, lift weights, work around the house, or work details to keep yourself busy so you never drink again. Doing something in the service of never doing something else can be a signpost that you're living on the left side of the Matrix. When a never shows up, you can change it into a goal by asking yourself, "What do I want to do instead to move toward my value?"

Realistic

Be practical about whether you can achieve what you want to do. Do you have the resources? Does what you want to do require steps? Consider your health condition, multiple or smaller steps that are necessary, available time, money, skill set, or other obstacles that might show up.

Time Framed

So, you've decided what you want to do, which is specific, meaningful, adaptive, and realistic. Now, be as accurate as possible about when you'll do it. You may choose to do it right now or aim to do it in a few hours, days, weeks, months, or years from now. An immediate goal is something you do within the next twenty-four hours. A short-term goal is something you do in a couple of days, weeks, or a month. Taking these small steps gets you moving. They can be as important as your big steps to complete long-term goals. A long-term goal is something you do in a couple of months or more. As soon as you do it, check it off. It's mission accomplished.

You're now ready to develop a SMART goal. Look at the area of life and the value for action you wrote down in the Matrix diagram. In the top right section, write down a corresponding SMART goal that you're 100 percent willing to commit to doing within the next twenty-four hours. Include any action steps necessary to complete the goal.

Next, list in the Matrix diagram any items on your pain and solutions lists that you think might show up, get in the way, or knock you off course from accomplishing your goal, such as what's happened in the past when you've tried to change your behavior and do something different. To help you with this, look at the Matrix diagram and the Values cards you've completed already.

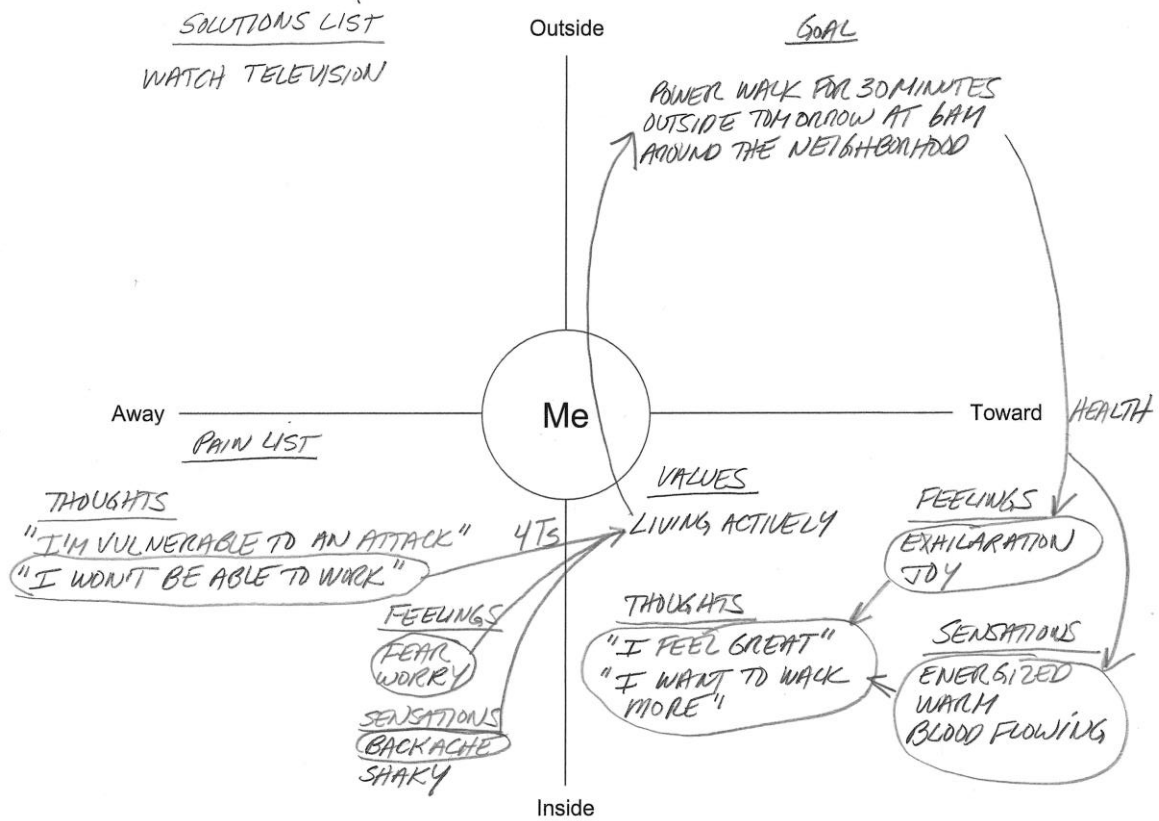
Step 4: Track Your Actions

Are you paying attention to what you're doing at all levels? What are you doing in the outside world? What are you doing in the inside world? What are you doing to move away from pain? What are you doing to move toward valued living? Keep track of your actions in different situations, how and whether they help you accomplish your stated goals, and notice their results. What did you think and feel? What did you do next? Were you successful? What did you get? Record these things in the Matrix diagram.

John's Story. Drawn next is an example of a situation where John used the 4Ts technique and completed his immediate goal to power walk for thirty minutes the next day at 6 AM in the service of living actively in the area of health. Initially, John wrote down items on his pain and solutions lists that he typically did instead of exercising.

When the next day came, he dressed up to exercise. Just before going outside to start walking, he noticed a little ache in his back and thought, "I won't be able to walk." He felt fear and worry. Using the 4Ts technique, he paused, took a breath, and smiled. He thanked his mind for the reminder that he cared and thought about his value of living actively. Then, he walked outside and power walked for thirty minutes around his neighborhood. After walking, John felt exhilaration and joy. His body felt energized and warm, and he could feel his blood flowing again. John thought, "I feel great; I want to walk more."

The Situation: THIS MORNING, AT 6AM I WAS STANDING ALONE IN MY KITCHEN DRESSED AND READY TO GO OUTSIDE TO POWER WALK FOR 30 MINUTES AROUND THE NEIGHBORHOOD.



After completing your immediate goal, you may develop more goals to complete, including short-term and long-term goals.

References

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Harris, R. (2009). *ACT made simple*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger.

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