

## Getting Unstuck Using the Timeline Process

One of my favorite processes to use with my clients as a life and career coach is the timeline. As I have explained here before, our brains LOVE symbols and thrive on metaphors and analogies. The great New Thought teacher, Louise Hay, wrote about the power of mental housecleaning. If you want to clear your mind, then clean a closet, she recommended. The physical act of reviewing items in your closet to be kept or donated — while holding the mental intention of clarifying your own productive and unproductive thoughts — is a powerful metaphor for your brain to use to take action.

In the same way, if you want to move forward in your life toward some dream or project, but feel overwhelmed by the details or crushed by the feeling of the sheer impossibility of it, there is monumental movement that can occur if you simply take a step forward.

And by a step forward, I mean a step forward. Really. Stand up right now. And take one step forward, while asking yourself, “I am ready to move forward toward this goal, but what is the next best step I can take right now to achieve it, large or small?”

What are the situations when you can use this timeline process?

1. *When you have a project you want to achieve but are unsure of the steps to take.*
2. *When you wish to have a better life, a better job, a better mate, etc., but you have no idea how to manifest this.*
3. *When you wish to attain your deepest desire or dream, and it seems too far off in the future or impossible to achieve in this lifetime.*

When a client is in my office, I go to my “cabinet of tricks” and pull out some rope I bought at Lowe’s; it’s thicker than what you might get for a jump rope and is about 12 feet long. I ask my client to lay it flat on the floor. We identify which end of the rope represents today. We’ve already determined when they want to achieve their goal; this could be “next week” “by the end of the quarter/end of the year” “within one year” “by the time I am fifty” et cetera. I usually try to assign a date to these statements, if possible. So, “within one year” is the month, day and year that is one year from the day we are working on the timeline exercise. If “age 50” is two years away, we figure out that date and use it. Once we know which end of the rope is today, then I will mark the other end of the rope as the date the goal will be accomplished.

Write a timeline like this on a piece of paper. Put your goal date at one end.



Normally, I will start the timeline on the whiteboard, filling it in as my client describes the highest level details.



I ask my client to stand at the end of the rope that represents today. I ask him or her to look down the timeline at the end of the rope and acknowledge what this represents in time — “That is a year from now,” they might say, for example.

I ask my client, “What is the very next step you can take right now that will get you closer to that goal?”

Invariably, clients who felt “stuck” and clueless about how to move forward will start to get ideas popping into their head. What’s the difference? The difference is that we are engaging different parts of the brain when we engage physically with a question or problem. The brain understands the need to move forward and will release information that allows you to do just that.

Once they have an idea of the next step, I ask them to take a step forward, and we celebrate this achievement. They have made real progress toward their goal; they have taken one significant step forward. It is farther than where they started at!

At this point, I try to see if the brain has unstuck itself by asking a broader question: “So, what are all the other ways you can move forward?” Often what will happen is that the client will experience an avalanche of great ideas, and I act as their scribe to ensure we get all these great ideas on paper.



If that avalanche doesn't happen, I simply ask, "So, now you have taken a step forward toward your goal. Tell me what the very next best step would be that would get you *even further* toward your goal."

I create guideposts along this physical timeline on the floor, based on their answers.

This is an exercise you can certainly do on your own, at home or at work. When I coach clients on the phone, I will ask them to use items nearby for their physical timeline. These might include:

1. An extension cord
2. A tape measure
3. A ball of twine
4. Yarn
5. The edge of a rug
6. The power cord from the vacuum cleaner
7. A 2x4

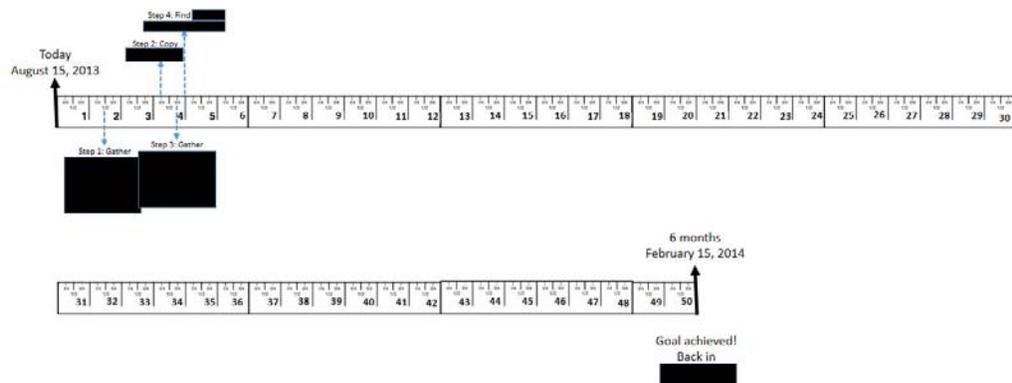
Really, you can use anything that you can lay on the floor, and you will know it means a timeline toward a future goal.



One of my clients only had a fabric tape measure, so we worked with that. He laid it on the floor of his apartment, and I talked him through this exercise. I then recreated the tape measure in a picture I made for him showing the work we did together. He told me how close each step would get him toward his goal. The tape measure was 50 inches long. So one particular step represented an inch and a quarter. Another smaller step only got him another half-inch closer.

We still celebrated each of these steps because they were all steps forward.

You can ask yourself these questions or ask a trusted friend, mate or coworker to help you by asking



these questions, as you stand on the timeline: "So, what is the very next best step you can take to move forward toward your goal?" Ask your friend to prompt you to physically step forward each time you create a new step. Remember to praise yourself heartily for every step you take!

You can certainly use this process to outline every step you need to take to reach your goal. Or you may take the first few steps and incorporate them into a written plan to achieve your goals. You will find that as soon as you get the first few steps identified, it will be much easier to create the others. In any case, I believe it's important to capture this information. By doing so, you are honoring the process and the internal contributions from your brain. I take photos with my phone of the timelines my clients create. I will take photos of each step. I take this information, and we create the timeline on paper so we don't miss a step. Later, you can create a written plan that is more fleshed out.

It all begins with that first step.

