

The Power of Baby Steps

By Amy Hume

Barbara (not her real name) wants a new job but just can't get her job search started. Seeing "find a new job" on her to-do list completely overwhelms her. It may as well say "climb Mount Everest." This is an ideal time for Barbara to use the power of baby steps.

The baby step is one of the strongest tools you can use to achieve your goals. Baby steps come from breaking your larger goal into smaller and smaller elements, which you then achieve one by one. When all feels lost, baby steps can keep you moving toward your goal.

When to Use Baby Steps

Pay attention to how you're feeling (and what you're saying to yourself) about the goal you're trying to achieve.

It's time to use baby steps when:

- You feel paralyzed by the size of your goal. (How the heck am I going to do this?)
- You aren't motivated to work on your goal. (I don't feel like it right now.)
- You could benefit from the feeling of accomplishment. (I'm stuck!)
- You feel you don't have much time to work toward your goal, but you want to progress nonetheless. (I'm stretched too thin!)

Baby Steps in Practice

It's easy to begin using this immensely powerful tool. Here's how Barbara can get started:

Pick Your Number 1 Priority: Barbara has many priorities, including finding a job, losing 20 pounds and planting a garden. When forced to choose, Barbara says her top priority is to find a job.

Break It Down and List the Steps in Order: Finding a job has many smaller steps, including researching employers, drafting a resume and landing interviews. Barbara must consider how these smaller steps fall in order. For example, she must have a resume before she can land an interview, so "draft a resume" should come before "land an interview."

Make Sure It Truly Is a Baby Step: Before you progress, be sure the step meets the following criteria: It must be something you can do in 30 minutes or less; it must be directly connected to a bigger step that directly supports your ultimate goal; you must have all the resources you need to complete it on hand

The Baby-Step Test

"Find a new job" is Barbara's ultimate goal, and she's identified "draft my resume" as her baby step. But is this really a baby step? Let's put it to the test:

Can It Be Done in 30 Minutes or Less? Barbara's resume is fairly recent; she just needs to update it with information from her last position. She estimates it will take her no more than 30 minutes to create her new draft and polish it. So far, so good.

Is It Directly Connected to a Bigger Step That Directly Supports the Ultimate Goal? "Draft my resume" is directly related to other subgoals, like "land an interview," that support Barbara's ultimate goal of finding a new job. She also has to make sure unrelated tasks (ie. "shop for shoes" or "walk the dog") don't derail her efforts.

Are All the Resources on Hand to Complete the Baby Step? To update her resume, Barbara wants to review her old performance evaluations to jog her memory of the projects she worked on. Unfortunately, those records are in storage.

Therefore, this task fails the baby-step test, because Barbara does not have all that she needs on hand. Her new baby step is now "get the records out of storage." Once she does that, she can begin again with "draft my resume."

Just Keep Stepping

You climb even the tallest mountain one step at a time. You can keep moving toward your goal if you set aside time each day to complete one or several baby steps. Keep your list of steps handy in case you lose steam or find an unexpected 30 minutes. The momentum you create by completing one baby step will lead you to complete the next and the next and the next. Before you know it, you will be at the top of that mountain and achieving your goal.