

Structures

A structure is a method for helping people remember and take action on what is designated as important. For example, putting a note in the client's calendar is a simple structure for jogging the memory and getting that person to take a desired action. But a structure will work only if people notice it. Whether or not they do what the structure indicates, the structure will lead to learning. The number of structures to get people into action is unlimited. Here we cover some of the basic categories.

Basic Structures

Here are some structures that have worked:

- Call your coach's voice mail or your own voice mail every day when a certain task is done. Or send an e-mail.
- Wear a rubber band on your wrist when you want to remember to do something, such as breathe deeply, speak powerfully, sit up straight, turn complaints into requests, or tell someone something positive.
- Throw a dinner party once a month. This can be a structure for cleaning house or keeping up relationships with friends.
- Find an exercise partner.
- Devise an intentionally fabricated deadline on the day you start a project—such as scheduling a meeting to show a colleague or friend your completed project in two weeks.
- Schedule appointments with one friend a week for two months.
- Put a chair in front of the door when you come in at night to remind yourself to take along important documents tomorrow.
- Send yourself an e-mail or voice mail to request that a certain task be done.

- Ask a friend to send you a pre-designed postcard once a month to encourage you to . . .

Counting is a structure. When you want to pay attention to a certain behavior—when your Saboteur shows up, for example, or when you acknowledge others—simply count how many times you do it in any given day. This is a structure that focuses your attention on noticing. You can also count the number of cigarettes smoked, the number of calories consumed, the number of sales appointments, the number of times you apologize, and the like. Counting does not require you to do anything other than notice. But noting every time you do something heightens your awareness.

A talisman can be a structure. A toy lion by the phone can remind the client to be ferocious in pursuit of a goal.

A coach is one of the best structures. Coaching is a relationship of accountability and a place where clients stop everything while they look at their lives, at how they are doing, and whether they are headed in the direction they want.

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Time Management

This category includes any kind of calendar, day timer, or to-do list. It can be paper, computer based, store-bought or handmade, rigorously designed down to the quarter hour, or just an overview. The key to its effectiveness is how well it fits the client. There is a mistaken belief that there is just one right way. For all the evolution in format and technology, from pencil and paper to palmtop, the appropriate system is what works for your client.

Money Management

For most people, about the only structure they have for managing this significant area of their lives is the register in their checkbooks. Other structures might include computer programs, a monthly budget, regularly scheduled money management discussions with a spouse, or the services of a financial planner or home budget consultant. This is by no means an exhaustive list; it merely gives you a sense of the variety of options available.

Using the Senses

For clients who are highly visual, any structure that appears in their daily field of vision is likely to work—sticking notes to their computer, the cabinet above the desk, or the refrigerator door, for example. Postcards or pictures cut from magazines are another good structure.

Repainting a room to change the visual space might be an important new structure for a client, or simply changing a chair position so that the client is forced to look at the world from a different perspective. Any structural device that engages these clients visually is likely to be powerful and effective.

Think about how you could use the other senses as well. Auditory structures, like music or an audiotape of affirmations, and even particular fragrances can be very powerful structures. Religious ceremonies and rituals have used fragrance for thousands of years because it's a structure that works. How could you use the structure of smell creatively in your clients' lives?

Some of the best structures come from your intuition and may not seem to make sense at first. Place watermelon seeds on the kitchen window sill... carry a flashlight in your briefcase... wear mismatched shoes today. One reason structures work is because they interrupt the ordinary mind-flow and grab your attention. The more outrageous they are, the more likely it is that they'll interrupt the semiconscious way we often glide through our days.

You may have a whole catalog of structures you have used with clients. That's handy and a great source of ideas. But it's also very effective to let clients create their own structures. Then the structure will be even better suited to the client.