

“Get Clear & Get Going!”
by Ann Daly, PhD

Editor’s Note: This is an excerpt from Dr. Daly’s book, Clarity: How to Accomplish What Matters Most, available online at www.anndaly.com.

We’ve all had the experience.

Remember?

It was a time when life, or work, seemed to flow effortlessly. You knew what you wanted, and how to make it happen. You enjoyed each step of the way, and you loved the results. No stress, no struggle, no neurotic procrastination.

When you’re clear, you can sort things out calmly, even playfully. Decision-making becomes easier. No wheel-spinning, no angsting.

Clarity is the catalyst to action, because with clarity comes commitment. When you’re committed, action takes surprisingly little effort.

Although we often think of clarity as an outcome, clarity is really a process. It is a habit of mind. What’s more, it is a habit of mind you can *learn*.

What follows is a five-step process that will keep you thinking clearly, acting purposefully, and accomplishing what matters most.

You can use this process to work out a particular issue, and you can use this process to change your whole approach to life. Either way, it will give you a way to get clear and get going!

1. Press “pause”

Pressing “pause” is the first step to the habit of clarity. You’ve got to take a direct and deliberate time-out. Every day. For fifteen minutes.

If you’re moving too quickly, the passing view is blurry. You’ll never find, let alone maintain, clarity.

Doing nothing permits us to relax into ourselves. (It’s like my first pilates teacher used to say, as we were struggling so hard to simply locate those elusive core muscles: “More feeling, less effort.”) We have space to notice what thoughts and emotions rise to the top. Our more risky or resistant feelings have space to make themselves known. Back burner ideas are given a fighting chance to make it to the front burner.

2. Pay attention

Once you've mastered 15 minutes of nothing a day, you're present and primed for active listening. To yourself. What can you observe about your own thinking patterns, emotional themes, and behavioral habits? This personal profiling is essential to the five-step process, because it is the basic material that will either block or enable the flow of clarity.

I'm not talking about turning into a narcissist, gazing admiringly at yourself in every passing mirror. I'm just talking about getting curious.

As you pay attention to your thoughts, emotions, and actions, it's important to keep the impulsive rush to judgement in check. Can you remember what it was like as a kid, when feeling wonder was fun enough? Can you watch yourself with that same wonder, at a slight distance, without letting personal baggage cloud your vision? Can you skip the color commentary?

Can you play the role of anthropologist, eager to study yourself as the most fascinating subject around?

3. Ask questions

Once you have become present to yourself by pressing pause and paying attention, you will find yourself naturally wondering "How . . . ?" and "What . . . ?"

That's when you realize: clarity is an inquiry.

Questions drive this self-inquiry. They provide depth, and detail. They connect the dots. They reveal what's been ignored, lost, or forgotten. They dislodge whatever's stuck. They cut through the clutter and debris. They dissolve the waxy buildup.

Keep asking those questions, and your priorities will become increasingly transparent--and powerful. No more feeling confused or conflicted about what matters most.

The goal is to ask probing, informational questions, which are open-ended and non-judgemental.

4. Ask more questions

Some questions are more difficult to pose than others. The hardest questions are the ones that cut closest to the bone. These are the heavy hitters you'll need when you meet your most stubborn fear and resistance.

At the moment when you feel the most exhausted, when you are venturing beyond your comfort zone, when the path of least resistance beckons, you need to ask the hardest

questions. This most treacherous stretch of the course requires you to remain relentlessly rigorous. “I don’t know” is not an option. Neither is fibbing.

The price of clarity is brutal honesty.

5. Write it down

Writing is a further way of inquiring into yourself. It can serve two purposes in your quest for clarity. First, you can use writing to access your intuition by journaling and freewriting. Second, you can use writing to commit to your intentions.

By writing down what you want to accomplish, it becomes more real.

And you hold yourself accountable. Once it’s down on the page, a “letter to the world,” you’ll find more courage to act and less chance to renege.

Ann Daly PhD (www.anndaly.com) is a coach, speaker, and author of *Clarity: How to Accomplish What Matters Most*. Based in Austin, Texas, she helps professional women get clear about what they want and how to get it. Sign up for her free monthly eletter at: www.anndaly.com/eletter.