

The Action Jar: Energising us to do things.

Relevant to: Depression:  Anxiety:  Irritability/Anger:  General emotional control: 

“What are we but what we think, what we say, and what we do?”

Sometimes people will simply sit, and do nothing. Nothing seems to be worth doing. And, the more you sit and do nothing, the more nothing seems worth doing. Which means that one may sit for hours, and it is a wonder that one ever moves at all.

The action jar decides for us.

The action jar is a simple jar – an empty jam jar for instance – into which you put a number of scrunched up pieces of paper. And on each piece of paper is written an activity you might do. So there might be twelve pieces of paper as follows: (1) clean the car, (2) do the washing up, (3) go for a walk, (4) phone Jo, (5) read a book, (6) go shopping, (7) go for a drive, (8) do the work that is worrying me, (9) read a magazine, (10) watch TV, (11) listen to some music, (12) listen to the radio.

All you do is: put you hand in the jar and pull out one piece of scrunched up paper; unfurl it to see what is written on it; do the activity that is written.

How does it work?

It works because when you get into the apathetic state we described, it is just as difficult – or more – to decide *what* to do as to actually do that thing. So if there is a device to do the deciding for you – namely the action jar – then half the battle is won.

You shouldn't really cheat.

Sometimes, you may delve into the jar, pull out a piece of paper, and it may say “Do the washing up”. You may then find yourself deciding that you don't want to do the washing up, you'd prefer to go for a walk. Well that's not really 'playing the game', but at least it's got you out of your apathy.

There are rules as to what you write on the pieces of paper.

You might find it difficult to think of what to write on the pieces of paper before you scrunch them up. If so, and in any case, follow three simple rules:

1. Make some of them active (e.g. go for a walk) and some of them tranquil (e.g. read a book).
2. Make some of them useful (e.g. do the washing up) and some of them recreational (e.g. go for a drive).
3. Use at least 6 pieces of paper, and not more than 20.

You don't have to be very apathetic to use the jar.

You can still use it even if you're just wondering what to do, just a bit bored.

You can have more than one jar.

Once you start using the action jar you will find some interesting things happen. For instance, you may pull out “watch TV” at 11am, in which case you might find yourself feeling that you don't want to watch TV at that time. Had you pulled out the same piece at 8.30pm however, you might have been pleased. So before long you may decide to get a second jar, so that you have a daytime jar and an evening jar. Some of the same activities (e.g. do the work that is worrying me) may be in both jars, but other activities (e.g. watch TV) won't be.

There's no limit to what you can do.

Once you've introduced your second jar, you might feel you need a third one, so you have a morning jar, and afternoon jar, and an evening jar.

Then you might feel there should be a difference between weekdays and weekends, in which case you'll want to introduce a weekday jar and a weekend jar.

Then you might feel that there should be a difference between Monday evenings and Tuesday evenings, say. In which case you may have five different weekday-evening jars. And so on.

You don't have to eat so much jam.

By now, there may be two thoughts in your mind:

1. This could be really good. Given time, I could design myself a life that suits me perfectly.
2. That's a lot of jam jars. My home is going to be full of jam jars.

And, the answer may have become clear to you too. Why not replace each jam jar with a page in an exercise book or a notebook? Then it reads much more like a cookery book, but with ideas for what to do, instead of recipes:

1. Ideas for weekday daytime.
2. Ideas for weekday evenings, a page each for Monday through to Friday.

3. Ideas for Saturday daytime.
4. Ideas for Saturday evening.
5. Ideas for Sunday daytime.
6. Ideas for Sunday evenings.

You can make it as simple or as complicated as you like. For instance, you might add a page for "Ideas for weekends" which might combine some of 3-6 above, but also include other things like trips away.

TIP: Resist the temptation to make it TOO complicated!

TIP 2: If you decide to develop a book like this, then let it evolve gradually; you will think of new ideas over time.

TIP 3: You don't have to use a notebook; you can do a similar thing on your computer if you have one, in which case you may like to password-protect it.

The end result can be transformational.

Never underestimate the power of what you do; if you want to invest in your mental capital then taking power over what you do is one of the most important steps possible. **True freedom necessitates true self-discipline.**

In-session discussion.

What would you write on the pieces of paper that get scrunched up and put in the jar?

(TIP: make a note of what others say too.)

How far would you develop your jar? Would you develop it into a 10 page notebook, or leave it at one jar?

Project for the week.

Make yourself an action jar – or use a notebook if you prefer.

Note: this is a good project; so if you want to do it, others will probably be interested to hear, next time.

Mythbuster:

"I like to be spontaneous – you lead a more interesting life if you're spontaneous." Not true.

Do you think people climb Everest or landed on the moon spontaneously? Good, interesting things take a lot of thought and organisation. And so do good interesting lives.

