



I Can't Seem to Get Started

David B Sachar MD

“I CAN’T SEEM TO GET STARTED”

**David B. Sachar
M.D., FACP, MACG, AGAF**

e-Book 2016 International Psychotherapy Institute

From *Achieving Success with ADHD: Secrets from an Afflicted Professor of Medicine* by David B. Sachar

Copyright © 2012 David B. Sachar

All Rights Reserved

Created in the United States of America

“I CAN’T SEEM TO GET STARTED”

No matter how big or how little the job is, the hardest part seems to be sitting ourselves down and getting started. There is something weirdly intimidating about making the commitment to begin. But once we start, the worst is often over (unless we get distracted—more about that in the next section).

Simple Rule #1:

Chip off a little chunk of the job for starters.

This rule is analogous to the Chinese proverb, “A journey of 1000 miles begins with a single step,” or more prosaically, we usually put pants on just one leg at a time.

Before starting any project, even something as simple as paying a stack of bills or answering some mail, I used to have to be sure that I had a completely clear playing field ahead—a guaranteed stretch of several hours in which I could not be distracted or interrupted. I couldn’t bear the thought of possible *taskus interruptus*.

These guaranteed stretches were generally between 2 and 5 AM. Jobs ultimately got done but only at the price of serious sleep deprivation.

The remedy proved strikingly simple. Don’t think of the task as a monolithic whole; regard it as a series of little chunks. No matter how intimidating the whole task appears, don’t be afraid to start off with just one tiny chunk. It will mean that you’ve accomplished something and, more often than not, this breaking of the ice will reveal that it’s not such a big glacier after all. In fact, taking the first whack at will probably initiate a continuing stream of ice chips until you’ve knocked off more of the job than you had anticipated at the outset.

Simple Rule #2:

Come back anytime and chip off a little bit more.

The same principle that applies to starting the job applies to making continuing progress on it. Once you realize that it's not like trying to jump over a canyon in two leaps, you can finish almost any job in stages, one piece at a time. In fact, this "one piece at a time" trick is very useful for filling "time chinks"—little segments of perhaps 15 to 30 minutes available and all-too-easy to fritter away. But if you have a job that can be chipped away at in pieces, an unscheduled "time chink" is ideal for filling with one of those detached pieces.

Mastering this chink-filling technique is part of the overall therapeutic goal of freeing ourselves from the "all-or-nothing" thinking that is so inimical to us ADHD people.