

## Chapter 4

### What are the traps that block accomplishment?

Few would argue that accomplishing a worthwhile outcome takes, amongst other things, considerable energy. It's like rolling a ball along towards a particular spot. If you leave it alone for a while, it rolls to a stop. If the way forward is sloping up or sideways, it takes more energy and more frequent attention to keep it going and to keep it on the right path. Even if the way forward is downhill, it takes more energy to stop it from rolling away and perhaps missing the target altogether. Often there are obstacles as well, things that need to be jumped over, pushed through, tackled head on, or just plain avoided.

In a similar way, moving along the path to accomplishment takes energy and attention, and it contains obstacles. We've talked already about how to effectively focus your energy and attention to accomplish the outcomes that you truly desire. In this chapter we'll look at dealing with obstacles.

Once again, there are no doubt many texts on how to deal with obstacles to accomplishment. However in our experience the most telling obstacles are those which rise up from within us, that we erect ourselves, and that we don't even recognise as obstacles. "But wait", you say, "why on earth would we erect our own obstacles?" Well, we wouldn't, not deliberately, but once again the way we approach accomplishment contains a range of conscious and subconscious behaviours, some of which are very helpful, and some of which are very unhelpful. It is the unhelpful behaviours that are our own obstacles.

We've identified 13 specific behaviours that are significant obstacles to accomplishment. We call these "Mind Traps", and in this chapter we'll look at each of them in turn. As we go through them, be watchful for evidence of them in yourself. Ask yourself: "Is this me? Do I do that?"

The first five mind traps deal with the way we handle ourselves on the journey to accomplishment. They describe how we prepare our excuses in advance, in case we don't make the headway we'd intended to when we first set off.

The first mind trap is “Tryer”. How many times have you said, “Well, I’ll try”, or even “I’ll try my best”. Probably quite a few times. But what’s wrong with that? After all, it wouldn’t do to promise something unless we’re certain we’re going to deliver it, so if we’re genuinely unsure, isn’t it more truthful to say “I’ll try”?

The point is that often the situation or the people involved need you to make a commitment. If you know that, then nothing short of giving that commitment and living up to it will do. Trouble is, you also know that giving a commitment and then missing it is “bad”. So if you’ve got any doubt about definitely delivering, it seems like a good self-protective move to hedge your commitment, just in case you “can’t” deliver in the end. And the best and easiest way to do that is to say “I’ll try”. Then if you don’t deliver, well hey, you only promised to try, didn’t you.

There are however several problems with this scenario. The first is that you know that saying you’ll “try” gives you the leeway not to deliver, so when pressed you can and probably will over-promise. It’s like overbooking a plane – it will fly with all seats full, but some people who have paid for a ticket and need to fly won’t be on it. Similarly, over-promising means that you’re guaranteeing in advance that some of what you’ve promised to “try” to deliver simply won’t happen. So you’re setting yourself up for some inevitable non-delivery.

This mind trap is particularly common in people who find it hard to say “no” to other people. Interestingly, if you research how those other people feel about that, you find that they’d much rather be told “sorry, no” than be told “I’ll try”. Why? Because if they’re not going to get it anyway they’d rather know now and thus have time to find another way.

The second thing is that there are things that you really do need to deliver, and having let yourself off by saying you’ll “try” means that you’re less likely to deliver now because you feel you’ve not really committed to do so. But in the eyes of the person who needs you to deliver this thing, all that matters is that you do deliver, and not doing so is a failure on your part, regardless of why. Therefore by saying “I’ll try”, you’re making a significant failure more likely to happen.

This, therefore, is a mind trap to strongly avoid. How? By either committing, or saying no, right from the start. Remember that commitment is one of the key principles of accomplishment, and that being honest with yourself and others by saying “no” when that’s needed is another principle of accomplishment. So learn to catch yourself saying the word “try”, and get out of the damaging habit of saying it. Make a start by committing to yourself now to do that.

The second mind trap is “Worry/Hope”. The whole essence of worry is that it’s about negative issues. You worry about problems and potential problems like constraints or setbacks. The trouble is, “where your focus goes, your energy flows”. Thus the energy you expend worrying is lost from positive issues such as for example harnessing support.

Of course when there aren’t many constraints and setbacks facing you, this may not seem like such a big deal. But problems don’t come in at a steady pace, and when they’re coming thick and fast you can spend so much time worrying about them that you completely lose your ability to make progress.

As a first step to avoid this mind trap, you can be aware of worrying and just say “stop”. Then you can focus on the positive side of how you’ll accomplish the outcomes you want. The benefit of this can be enormous. In effect you’re empowering yourself to reach past the problems, rather than battling through them.

We acknowledge though, that for many people this is easier said than done. If this is so for you, then we suggest a simple method for reaching past your problems, and it goes like this:

Imagine that you’re in the future, say a few months, and at that time the reality is that you have solved a particular problem. From that vantage point, the reality is that you were successful in moving past that problem. Imagine then that someone asks you “How did you solve that problem a few months back?” Think back on how you did it, and in the process describe an entirely plausible method by which you solved that problem. Then come back into the present and go and apply that method to your problem. You can also use this approach in a group or

team setting to move past difficult problems. In our experience, this approach is far more productive than endlessly worrying about your problems.

“Hope” is similar, except that it can be both positive and negative. You might hope for good things, or hope for problems not to occur. The negative version of “hope” is a close cousin of “worry”, so we suggest that you give it the same treatment as “worry”. The positive version of “hope” seems at first glance to be useful, but on closer inspection it’s a cousin of “tryer”. By hoping that something positive will happen, you’re side-stepping your own responsibility to “deliver” it. We therefore suggest that you give it the same treatment as “tryer”.

The third mind trap is “Doubt”. Doubting yourself or doubting others, or both. Simply put, doubt paralyzes action. It sets up a dynamic of fear and procrastination that freezes you and stops forward movement.

*“Self-doubt was my biggest mid trap. It came down to the word “I” - I always felt that I had to explain and justify using the word “I” – it felt so introverted, egocentric, win/lose. But I came to see that my ability to achieve my vision depended on my own self-confidence.” – B.*

In effect, doubt is the opposite of “decide”, the first and most critical principle of accomplishment. Doubt is therefore a very damaging mind trap. We suggest that you approach doubt by focusing instead on “decide”. So if you have a real issue with doubt, then we suggest that you revisit the section on “decide” in the last chapter.

The fourth mind trap is “Confusion”. This is very similar in its effect to “doubt”. If you’re confused about something, you’ll find it very hard to reach a decision. This whole area of doubt/confusion/uncertainty is nothing short of a heaven-sent opportunity to avoid taking a decision, if that’s what you want. In our experience, this “decision avoidance” lies at the heart of doubt/confusion/uncertainty.

The question is then, why would we avoid decisions when that could block our accomplishment? The thing is, while we might passionately want to accomplish the outcomes we want overall, there may well be things we need to do along the way that are outside our current comfort zone. In our experience, a primary

reason for decision avoidance is that we already know that the answer will require us to operate outside our comfort zone.

Once you recognise that this is the underlying “game” that’s driving your doubt/confusion/uncertainty, you can address the issue more directly. You can acknowledge the real issue, and then make a conscious decision about moving outside your comfort zone and into your zone of learning. In our experience, most people want to grow, and this is where the rubber meets the road on the personal growth issue. So go for it! If you truly desire to grow, this is your big opportunity!

The fifth mind trap is “Regret”. While not so obvious as some of the other mind traps, this one is part of a particularly vicious downward spiral.

Regret is rooted in “should have” and “if only”. A twinge of regret may be natural after a mistake or a failure – it’s part of the learning process. But lasting regret means that you’re beating yourself up for your mistake, or even for someone else’s. This, not surprisingly, erodes your self-confidence, which makes you less able to confidently take decisions going forward, which leads to a degree of self-paralysis, all of which can greatly impact your progress towards accomplishing the outcomes you want.

To make matters worse, your personal response to your mistake or failure may well include shame, or guilt, or feelings of worthlessness, all of which are very self-destructive and greatly damage your ability to accomplish the outcomes you want.

Our advice? What’s past is done. You can regret it, or you can learn from it. It’s your choice. Take responsibility for the fact that you’re beating yourself up, and consciously move on from that behaviour to a learning stance.

*“I learnt never to look back. If one door closes, there’s another waiting to be opened.” – D.*

The next three mind traps deal with the way we handle others on the journey to accomplishment. They describe how we behave inappropriately in our efforts to

secure the help of others, in the process perhaps damaging our chances of successfully accomplishing the outcomes we want.

This group starts with the sixth mind trap, "Explanation". This mind trap is most commonly found in management. Perhaps at first glance it isn't obvious that "explanation" is a mind trap, but it is. Let's look at it more closely.

There's a fairly standard management ritual that when you don't deliver an expected result, an explanation is due as to why. What's needed is a brief and factual explanation, and we don't see this as a mind trap - it's a natural part of the management process.

However because an explanation is a statement of the reasons for non-delivery of results, it is at its heart defensive. Because of this, our explanations are often much more about our reasons and stories for why we didn't do or won't be doing what was needed. Are your alarm bells ringing yet? If not, have another look at the seventh principle of accomplishment in the last chapter, and you'll see how "explanation" opposes "taking responsibility". You'll also see our suggestions on ways to eliminate this damaging mind trap.

The seventh mind trap is "Self Righteousness". No doubt volumes have been written on the human ego and egocentric behaviour. This behaviour results in people giving their own point of view more credence than the viewpoints that others express. And this is not necessarily a "bad" thing! But where it leads to problems is where the essential balance between the viewpoints of ourselves and others isn't maintained. Then we become "captured" by the "rightness" of our own viewpoint, and give it more weight than is healthy for our relationships with those around us. People who are very knowledgeable are particularly at risk for self-righteous behaviour.

Self-righteousness is about our unwillingness or inability to accommodate anyone else's viewpoint. It's fairly obvious that this damages our relationship with the people who hold those other viewpoints, and this in turn damages our ability to secure and maintain their support for our goals. The saying that "people hate a know-it-all" is a big clue! Self-righteousness is therefore self-defeating. A

more useful approach would be to recognise that there are many viewpoints that need to be accommodated in a positive way.

The sad reality is that many people have trapped themselves in their need to be right. If you're one of them, ask yourself this: Would you rather be right or be friends? The point is that realistically you can't be both. We're willing to bet that very few people would rather be right than be friends. So if you're busy being right all the time, then it's time to realise that the damage this is doing to your relationships isn't worth it, and that it's time for a personal shake-up. It's also time to realise that any damage to your relationships is damage to your accomplishment.

*"I used to be pretty bullet-proof, but now I see that in this world you'll never achieve anything in isolation – you need other people to make it work." – D.*

We suggest that a useful way to eliminate this damaging mind trap is to acknowledge that the very people you "know better than" are probably "better than you" at relationships, and are therefore "better than you" at accomplishing the outcomes they want. This helps you respect their overall "different but equal" status with you, which makes it less likely that you'll feel "superior" to them and thus behave in a self-righteous way in the future.

We've seen some impressive results when people move themselves effectively out of the self-righteousness mind trap. Their relationships flourish, they have a glow of inner happiness at being truly connected with others, perhaps for the first time in a long time, and they accelerate seemingly effortlessly towards accomplishing the outcomes they want.

*"I'd been an individual expert before - now my style is to get it done through other people. That's enabled me to achieve far more than before." – B.*

The eighth mind trap is "Con Man or Woman". How tempting it can be, when you really need something from someone but know you won't get it if you're honest with them, to use a little deceit and, hey presto! You've got what you want.

Let's face it, who among us is such a saint that they've never done that and never will? No doubt many of us have exaggerated or manipulated information to get what we want at some time or other. Have you?

You already know this, but let's say it anyway: the problem is that people often find out that they've been conned, and next time you need something from them, you're in big trouble. So honesty is not just the best way, it's the only way.

Interestingly, sometimes people's love for others or their own self-interest can result in them being willing to be conned more than once. This makes it especially attractive for the con man or woman to continue conning them. However this just leads to an ever-increasing "debt", which ultimately results in loss of respect and/or a king-sized piece of trouble when enough is finally enough. Either way, you can see how comprehensively this mind trap destroys your ability to secure people's longer-term help in accomplishing the outcomes you want.

The last five mind traps deal with the way we handle external obstacles on the journey to accomplishment. They describe how we avoid accountability for setbacks or failures by laying blame outside ourselves.

This group starts with the ninth mind trap, "Resentment". If I blame you for a setback or failure, then it's your fault, not mine, and yet I'm the one who's suffered. I might resent that. In this way, resentment follows and is rooted in blame.

The only value in holding others to blame for setbacks or failures in the accomplishment of the outcomes you want is that it lets you take yourself off the hook. This is of course why we do it! But let's face it, blaming others contributes nothing to moving you closer to accomplishing the outcomes you want. In fact it's counter-productive. You could be making headway if you accepted accountability and got on with it, but instead you're making no headway because you're too busy blaming someone else and resenting them for it. You might even be seeking revenge!

If this mind trap is one you recognise in yourself, we recommend that you revisit the seventh principle of accomplishment in the last chapter, and you'll see how "blame" and "resentment" oppose "taking responsibility". You'll also see our suggestions on ways to eliminate this particular mind trap.

*"I resented that my father was inattentive to me as a child. Seeing that this was a mind trap helped me face up to it. I went away and challenged my father about it, and we successfully worked through it." – M.*

The tenth mind trap is "Resignation". The theme here is "There's nothing I can do about it. What's the use? I give up". Hopelessness and despair reign.

What this mind trap does is put responsibility for failure onto an external force too strong to oppose. Once again it's an avoidance of personal responsibility for getting the desired results and accomplishing the outcomes you want. And once again, the seventh principle of accomplishment, "take responsibility" is an antidote we recommend for this mind trap.

No doubt there are external forces too powerful to overcome, but there's also no doubt that people who give up mostly do so in the face of forces that they could overcome if they really set their mind to it. The saying "when the going gets tough, the tough get going" is a reminder to us all of the power of true commitment. So if you're caught in this mind trap, we also recommend that you review the second principle of accomplishment in the last chapter, "commitment".

The eleventh mind trap is "Cynicism". Is there perhaps some cynic in us all? You might be surprised though at how comprehensively self-defeating cynicism really is.

Have you ever been faced with a through-and-through cynic? How did you relate to them inside yourself? A typical reaction to cynics is "if it's as bad as you're playing it, then why are you still here?" In other words, people see cynicism as basically dishonest.

What are the chances that you would follow a cynic, that you'd be willing to respect them as your leader? We bet your answer is "not much chance". And conversely, how many outstanding leaders do you notice being cynical? We bet your answer is "none I can think of".

If you're a cynic then, you're more or less completely torpedoing any possibility that people will give their energy to helping you accomplishing the outcomes you want.

Just as importantly, cynicism is also coming from blaming others for "the situation", for which reason the observations we've made about the "resentment" mind trap also apply to the cynicism mind trap. Interestingly, once cynics wake up to the enormous harm they are doing to themselves, they often miraculously let their "cloak of cynicism" fall away. Now that really tells you something about cynicism, doesn't it! Our advice: if you're a cynic, wake up and let it go.

*"I've seen many people go through this wake-up now. I love seeing how the cynic gets washed out of them, how their appetite for learning becomes so strong." – B.*

The twelfth mind trap is "Disassociation". This person is apathetic. Their theme is "I can't accept it, but I can't change it, so now I don't care". Whatever "it" is, you can be sure that it was a major event for the disassociated person. Otherwise why would it cause such a powerful emotional reaction?

The key to disassociation lies in the "I can't" part of the rationale. The fact is, you can if you choose to. One option is to just accept "it", however unpalatable that might be. At least that way you're able to move on, regroup, rebuild, and reconnect with the outcomes you want and set about accomplishing them. The alternative is to remain stuck, disassociated, and with your feelings suppressed. So you're going to be much better off by accepting it, wouldn't you say?

Another possibility is that maybe you can even change "it". As always, it's really your choice. One thing is sure though – if you choose to sink into disassociation, it's "game over" as far as accomplishing the outcomes you want is concerned.

The thirteenth and last mind trap is “Victim”. In our view, the victim theme runs through a number of other mind traps, so we’re going to give it major attention. If you look back over the last six mind traps for instance, you’ll see how the transfer of blame onto an external party is founded in victim-hood. The theme is “I’m not to blame – they are”.

We all understand what it is to be a victim. It means that someone “did it to us”. We were wronged, damaged, hurt, and it wasn’t our fault at all, it was all the doing of the offender. We see daily evidence of real crimes, real perpetrators and real victims. Our society accepts the concept of victim-hood and provides extensive and much-needed formal and informal victim support.

This is a natural and vital part of a caring society. Every day there are instances where people become real victims of the misdeeds of others. For people in these circumstances, victim-hood is not a mind trap, and the spontaneous and generous support of others can be vital to restoring their well being.

So what’s the problem? Are there circumstances in which victim-hood can be a mind trap? The short answer is yes. Most of us feel the need for sympathy from time to time, and in itself even that is not a mind trap. When it becomes a mind trap is when you “use” people’s caring response to real victims as a way to “get” sympathy when you’re not a real victim.

It’s also a mind trap when someone who was once a real victim “trades on” their victim-hood long afterwards. The point is that even if you’ve been a real victim, you don’t have to live the rest of your life like that. You didn’t have a choice about what happened, but you do have a choice about what will happen next, and how you’ll feel and behave. Your real victim-hood is in the past. Now you are responsible for how you go forward.

Victim is an easy mind trap to fall into, because it’s so instinctive, and people’s goodwill and support is so quickly and generously extended to real victims. But in the end, “playing at” or “trading on” being a victim is basically a con, and our comments about the “con man or woman” mind trap are also relevant here.

Unfortunately, we often manage to con ourselves in the process of conning others. Anytime we're feeling hard done by, we start feeling like a real victim of an external perpetrator, and we start needing and looking for the solace and support of others. But if you challenge a person who is playing at being a victim about what they're doing, the typical response is firm to strong denial. "Who me? No way!" Even anger: "Who are you calling a victim?"

*"I encounter the victim mind trap the most. Now I challenge people who're being victims, but I don't use the word victim, because they wouldn't accept seeing themselves as a victim." – B.*

Why do we con ourselves like that? The basic reason is that it shifts the "blame" for whatever has gone wrong, or just isn't going the way we want it, onto an external party, so that we don't have to admit to ourselves that we're either partly or fully accountable ourselves. At its heart then, the victim mind trap is coming from blaming others to avoid facing our own accountability.

How do you feel about the proposition that you might be one that plays at or trades on being a victim? Do you feel yourself quickly dismissing that notion? Ultimately only you know if you're a real victim or not, so it's up to you to be honest with yourself and others, however tough that may be, which is one of the principles of accomplishment.

*"I find that victim is the place most people go first. It's a great way to explain away why you're not prepared to commit. I try to get people to see that they're opting out." – T.*

If playing at being a victim is a regular mind trap for you, here's a way to lift yourself out of that mind trap:

Think of a situation in which you know in your heart that you were "playing at" being a victim. Now tell that story, but tell it from the viewpoint that you were accountable for what happened. Imagine that you set it up and you chose the steps, without which the situation wouldn't have happened. Now acknowledge that you weren't really a victim after all. OK, it's no fun admitting, even just to yourself, that you've been playing at being a victim. But it's tremendously

empowering, because finally you realise that you and only you are accountable for yourself and what you accomplish in this life, and you can stop hiding behind “external forces” when things go wrong, and you can stand, finally, and deliver.

Perhaps the greatest role model for people caught in the victim mind trap is Nelson Mandela. If ever anyone had a perfect opportunity to be a victim it was Nelson, and he turned it down, and we can all see how tall he stands as a result.

This is the raw power of overcoming your own victim-hood, and it's probably the single most important contribution that you can make to your own success.