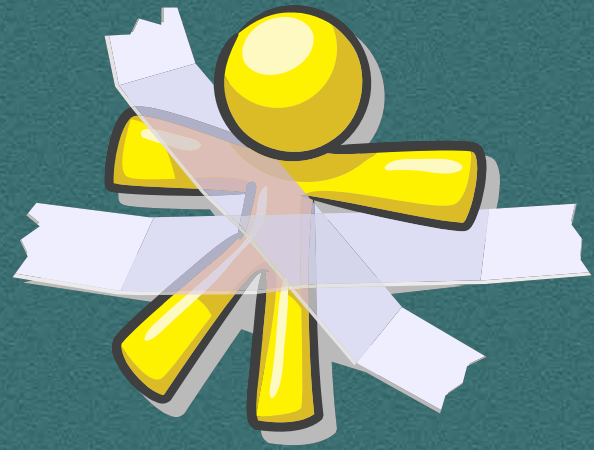


10
Ten Tips
To
Get
Unstuck



Sherry Essig



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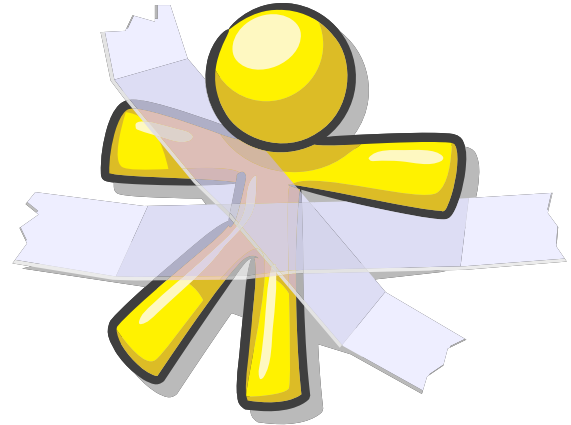
Intro

Introduction: Using the Ten Tips

When you're stuck, it can feel as if you need something huge to get things moving again. You want your sense of motion and flow back – and it doesn't seem like anything short of a bomb blast could possibly be enough.

The good news is that all it really takes is a little spark to help things start to shift.

These Ten Tips are intended to be exactly that: a spark to ignite your progress. A way to get you moving and unstuck.



Start slowly. Read through the Tips and pick the one that most resonates with your situation. Give it a try. If you get bogged down, don't force yourself to keep going. Instead, come back and pick another one and start there.

As you begin to see results, come back and choose the next tip to work on. One or two might be all it takes to get you back in the flow or you might decide to keep on going and tackle all ten. Either way, give yourself a chance to see results and enjoy the journey!



1 Tip 1: Start your day with a choice

In 2004, I read an interview in *Worthwhile* magazine (sadly, now defunct) about an IBM executive who began each day with the statement, “I choose to believe today will be the greatest adventure ever.”

She described how viewing life through this lens had fundamentally changed her daily experience. Project not going as planned? No reason to get tied up in knots, it’s all part of the greatest adventure. Flying high after the successful rollout of a new initiative? Whee, what fun, but don’t forget, it’s just *part* of the greatest adventure. Stress levels climbing? Time to regroup and remember adventures are about discovery and fun.



I’d worked with clients for years on the power of perspective and daily actions to help them get unstuck, but I’d never married the two in quite this way. I couldn’t wait to test it out – with me as the guinea pig.

After a few tries, I came up with the perspective I wanted to hold, developed my statement, and began using it daily. “Today, I choose to believe I will be on an interesting hike filled with learning and opportunity.”

As I saw shifts happening for me, I started sharing the approach with my clients. Many of them adopted the practice, with similarly powerful results.

What choice do you want to make? Take the time to choose words that resonate for you.

Create your statement and use it daily. The same statement, every day. Add it to your morning routine. You can say it out loud in the shower. If you journal, make it the first or last thing in your entry. Write it on a post-it and stick it on your bathroom mirror.

Then as you move through the day with its ups and downs, remind yourself what you’ve chosen to believe.

Make it a regular habit and after a few weeks, you’ll be amazed at the impact it will have on your perspective ... and the way you live your day!



2 Tip 2: Take a Moment

Every day you get one thousand four hundred and forty minutes. That's it; no more, no less.

Some days those minutes flow beautifully. Other days, you're stuck; you just can't get in the groove.

Whether you're in the flow or feeling immobilized and stuck, it's the choices you make that create your experiences in those 1,440 minutes.

Obviously, how you choose to spend your time shapes your day. But your mindset has an even bigger impact – often in surprising ways. And it's easy to get caught up in the details of your daily life and get stuck in “doing,” forgetting about the “being” part.



That's why you need to take a moment. Just one. You'll have 1,439 left for all that other stuff. A few years ago in the midst of a particularly busy project, I commented to a friend, “My life is really crazy right now.” It was a casual comment, in the middle of a casual conversation.

As we hung up the phone, I suddenly heard what I'd said. Yes, my life was busy, but it wasn't crazy. Yet I was making myself feel that way by how I was talking and thinking about it. Not good!

I was so stuck in the overwhelm of the “doing” part of my work that I'd neglected to choose how I wanted to “be.” And how I want to be is not crazy; it's calm and fully present. My choice. Now I make sure to check in with myself a few times a day to ask the question, “How am I living today?” Since I can easily get caught up in what I'm doing and forget to pause, I've set it up as a recurring task in Outlook. Twice a day, up pops my reminder.

How do you want to live *your* day?

Take a moment to notice how you're moving through your 1,440 minutes. In fact, take several. Every day. It's just a tiny fraction of the time you have.

And that's not a very big investment to help you live your day the way you want to live your life.



3 Tip 3: Forecast Your Time

Ever had the feeling you're not getting enough done?
(Okay, who hasn't felt that way!)

On one of our coaching calls, my client Diane talked about the pressure she felt to work late into the night because she rarely got *enough* done during the day. When I asked why she thought she should be accomplishing more, her response was, "There's always so much left on my to-do list at the end of the day."



Interesting way to measure progress. It's unconnected to what is – or isn't – realistic.

When I suggested she estimate the time for each activity on the following day's to-do list, she was shocked by the total. Turns out she was expecting to do 37 hours of work in a single day. No wonder she felt stuck in a long list of uncompleted to-do items!

Forecasting your time is a powerful tool. It can save you time in the long run, help you focus on what's most important, and lower your stress levels. It doesn't have to be complicated, just a simple estimate of what's on your plate for the day and the week. You can write it on a piece of paper or set up a simple spreadsheet. What's most important is to find an approach you can stay with.

Once you know what's realistic, you'll make better choices about what stays on the list ... and what goes. You'll end the day feeling like you're making progress, instead of stuck in a quagmire of unfinished tasks.

It may take a few weeks to get in the groove, but once you do you'll have a new tool to help you live your day the way you want to live your life.



4 Tip 4: Be Intentional

When I was a kid, “intentional” was a word that meant trouble. As in, “That was no accident – you tripped your sister *intentionally!*”

But over the years it’s shifted to being one of the most powerful words in my vocabulary – and one of the most powerful to help my clients get unstuck.



When you’re intentional, you’re consciously choosing, and your actions reflect careful thought. It’s the opposite of getting mired in habitual situations and patterns that no longer work.

I was at dinner one night with a group of friends. One of them was expressing frustration with her job; she’d been feeling stuck and unhappy for some time. Another friend observed, “It sounds like you’re miserable, but you’re not doing anything about it. What’s your objective in being there?”

The question stumped her. It wasn’t something she’d spent any time considering. Making intentional choices applies to the big decisions in life and also to the day-to-day “small stuff.”

A perfect place to practice is with email – the consummate time thief if you’re not careful. Next time you look at your inbox, take a few seconds to decide your intent. Will you spend 15 minutes on high-priority messages? Or will you read and answer everything no matter how long it takes? Perhaps you intend to whittle it down to a specific number?

It’s not about the right or wrong choice. It *is* about making sure you’ve thought it through before jumping into action – so you don’t get stuck in something by accident.

Keep your focus on living with intention, and you’ll soon find each day begins to feel like the way you want to live your life.



5 Tip 5: Consider Your Impact

Back in my corporate life, I worked with an executive who was one of the most easy-going people I've ever met. He had a friendly hello for everyone, never seemed to have mood swings, and was just a pleasure to be around.

And one day the unexpected happened. He showed up grouchy.

The impact was enormous. Everyone was convinced something awful had happened or was about to happen.

Turns out it really was nothing. He was simply having a bad day.

It's not at all uncommon to impact others in ways we don't mean. We get busy, distracted, and stuck in our own stuff.

How often do you stop to consider the effect you are having on those around you? It's not about being perfect, but simply paying attention. And if it turns out you've had an unintentional impact, do something about it. More often than not, a few words will do the trick. Like my clients, you'll discover that a small action can repair relationships with others – and will help you shift and get unstuck yourself.

One measure of the way you live your life is how you touch the people whose paths you cross. Taking just a few brief seconds to focus on your intended impact can make a difference to them ... and to the way you live your life.





6 Tip 6: Fast Forward A Few Years

It's the end of the day, you're up to your elbows in work, and once again those plans to exercise are flying out the window. (Your scenario may be different, but you get the picture!)

In his book *First Things First*, Stephen Covey suggests that most people are driven by their feelings of urgency instead of by the importance of what they're doing.

In the heat of the moment, it's easy to get stuck paying attention to whatever's screaming loudest for attention. Sometimes that's truly what's important (not just urgent) – but more often it's not. And when you choose your actions based on what's urgent, what goes by the wayside are the activities that, when you look back later, you'll wish you'd chosen.

On any given day what's most important may be meeting a client deadline or finishing a report – or it may be leaving work in time to attend your child's soccer game or take quiet time for yourself.

If you're stuck in your sense of urgency, take a moment to evaluate where your alternatives fit relative to each other. Fast forward a few years and view your choices from a perspective of "looking back." You might be surprised at what you see.

It takes commitment and courage to choose the important over the simply urgent. While it may not happen overnight, it's worth the effort. And when you focus on what matters most you'll find yourself living your day the way you want to live your life.



7 Tip 7: Watch Your Words

My niece Alyssa tells me I'm the luckiest person she knows. At nine years old, she enviously declared that the best thing about being a grown-up is that no one can *make* you do anything. "You don't have homework. You can drive. You can stay up late, wear make-up, and go shopping whenever you want to."

In short, I can do anything.

My first impulse was to laugh, but in fact, she's right.

Yet how many times have you heard yourself saying, *I have to* or *I can't*? Despite being taught as a kid that "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me," words do have power. And the words you direct towards yourself have a lot of power.

Each time you say or think that you *have to* or *can't* do something, you've just sent yourself the message that you're not at choice. That's a pretty good recipe for staying stuck in feelings of stress and frustration.

More importantly, it's simply not true most of the time.

Banish "I can't" and "I have to" from your vocabulary except when they're literally true – as in, "I can't bench press 500 pounds." (Unless, of course, you're a professional body builder.)

For instance, if you decide to work late and skip dinner with family or friends, try saying, "I'm missing dinner tonight because I'm choosing to work late to finish my client project on time," rather than, "I have to work late."

You won't need to spend the rest of your life giving long-winded explanations for every choice you make. Just long enough to create your new habit of using language that reflects the real choices you're making – and to get yourself unstuck from the feelings of helplessness that "I have to" and "I can't" tend to create.

Watch your words. Use them intentionally. You'll be amazed at the results.

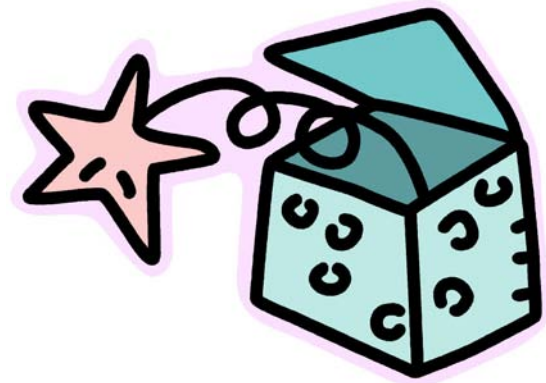




8 Tip 8: Playing Safe Is Risky Business

Playing safe is risky business.

I heard that line in a movie a few years ago. The movie wasn't memorable, but the line sure was. It reminded me of a frayed and yellowing article I have from the January 15, 1990 issue of *U.S. News and World Report* entitled "To Win, First You Must Lose."



The premise was that people who willingly risk failure and learn from their losses have the best chance of succeeding at whatever they try. The author wasn't suggesting you take up failure as sport. But he was saying that risk avoidance zaps creativity, limits your true potential – and keeps you stuck.

This applies to every aspect of your professional and personal world.

Sometimes the decisions are big, affecting career direction, relationships, and so on. More often it's the day-to-day choices you make in areas that feel like risky territory: airing a dissenting opinion, sharing an outside-the-box idea, or telling someone how you really feel. The "safe" choices – to remain quiet, put your creative ideas on hold, and keep your emotions hidden – are missed opportunities.

Comfort zones are cozy places that are easy to stay stuck in. Your dreams happen outside them. Pay attention to how often you choose the safe route – and what happens when you don't. Keep a written list for a month, and notice what themes emerge. And take a daily chance, no matter how small. It may take some getting used to, but soon what felt risky yesterday will be no big deal today.

Give it a try ... for the sake of the life you want to be living.



9 Tip 9: Try Something Different

“Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”

- Albert Einstein.

I suspect this was not only an observation, but something Einstein personally experienced. I know I have!

Think back to a time when something in your life wasn't working the way you wanted, yet you stayed stuck doing the same actions and thinking the same thoughts – over and over again. What did you ultimately do differently to change your situation?

In my college chemistry classes, I was fascinated by the impact of small changes on an experiment. Modifying an ingredient, changing the order, or altering the timing all produced different outcomes – sometimes minor, other times dramatic. And exact repetition yielded identical results.

The same can be said for life. Simple shifts in thoughts or actions create change. And repeating your patterns time and again just brings you more of the same.

So when you're stuck, try something different. Nothing big – just a small change.

If your normal routine is to go out to lunch, take a walk instead. Spend a day speaking up more often – or stay quiet and just listen. Change your schedule for a week. Be detailed in your planning, or throw today's plans out the window.

Pick something, anything. It truly doesn't matter what as long as it's different. You'll learn something useful and gain new insights on how to live your day the way you want to live your life.





10

Tip 10: Act On Your Intuition

Listen to your intuition.

How many times have you heard, thought, or said that?

Here's my amended version: When your intuition speaks, act on what you hear.

One of my most painful professional experiences happened early in my business when my partner and I took on a consulting client who didn't feel right. We convinced ourselves it would be fine, especially since the referral came from a good friend who served on the client's Board and in all other respects it looked like a good project.



I'll skip the gory details (that's best told with a glass of wine in hand!). Suffice to say it would have served us well to have trusted *and* acted on our intuition.

Like any skill, honing your instincts takes practice and focus.

Create a daily habit of checking in with yourself. Whether you're facing a big decision or just starting another regular day, there's a lot of wisdom to be found from your neck down. Just a minute or two of quiet time, looking inward, can yield surprising information.

Then do one thing a day based on what you discover. It doesn't matter if big or small, just get out there and practice. Pretty soon, it'll be a habit – and a great tool to help you get unstuck.

Your mind gets a full workout every day. Why not spend a few minutes on your intuition? The more you allow yourself to truly listen – and take action on what you hear – the more you'll live your day the way you want to live your life.



Summary Checklist

Each of these ten tips can help you get unstuck. They work. But only if combined with the *real* secret of success – consistency and persistence.

The key to sustainable change is creating new habits. Adopt a consistent daily practice for any of the tips below and after several weeks it becomes easier.

You need persistence because change doesn't happen overnight. I wish it did. Whichever tip(s) you choose to work on, stick with it. Research shows that it can take three to six months to create a sustainable new habit, but you'll begin to see real change in as short a timeframe as 21 days.

So, why the checklist below?

Early on you'll need a spoonful (not a gigantic bowl!) of self-discipline to shift your habitual patterns. Whether you're working on your first tip or your tenth, print a clean copy of this page every week and use it as a daily reminder. (If you'd prefer an electronic copy, [click here](#).) Each day you practice your tip, check it off the list. The act of physically tracking your progress will help you get in the flow and dramatically improve your results.

Today I will...	M	T	W	Th	F	Sat	Sun
Consciously choose my mindset							
Pause at least once today to ask, "How am I living my life today?"							
Realistically assess my to-do list							
Pay attention to my choices—big and small—and make them intentionally							
Keep my antenna up and notice the impact I have on others							
Consider the big picture in choosing what's most important today							
Banish "I can't" and "I have to" from my vocabulary							
Get out of my comfort zone (even if just a tiny bit)							
Try something different in a place I feel stuck							
Act on my intuition							



Small steps lead to big changes.

I hope these tips have sparked your enthusiasm to create change in your life.

Once you've worked with these tips for a few weeks, you may find you're back in flow ... or well on your way. If that's the case, I'd love to hear what worked for you.

Or maybe you're off to a good start, but you'd like this getting-unstuck process to be a little quicker and easier. I can help you with that! It can be hard to be objective or measure progress when you're right in the middle of it all.



"From my first coaching session with Sherry, I knew that I was making progress on becoming a better "me." Immediately, she was able to help me identify the issue that had been paralyzing me, holding me back in my life. The annoying little buzzing thing that I couldn't name, but knew was there. Fear. As we worked together, I had many epiphanies and learned new skills to help me move through my fear. I still use those tools in my life today – four years later. Sherry was the perfect mid-wife for birthing a new me!

- Michele Marple Thomas, IBM

If you're not sure where to go next or how to gain the momentum you need to get unstuck – let's chat.

Send me an email at sessig@priorityventures.com with a few words about where you're stuck and I'll get back to you with some options to talk. We'll hop on the phone, decide if we're a good fit to work together, and go from there.

I look forward to hearing from you!

P.S.

You can count on a new idea or tool to help at least once a month in my free newsletter. If you received this e-book from a friend or colleague, please sign-up at www.priorityventures.com/newsletter.htm to receive your monthly tip. After all, unstuck is way more fun!



About

The Author

Sherry Essig

Sherry Essig specializes in **helping professionals get unstuck.**

For over ten years, executives, business owners, entrepreneurs, and service professionals such as attorneys and CPAs have been reaching out to Sherry for help in those places where we all get stuck at times – career, a specific goal, overall life balance, or a general feeling of stagnation and overwhelm.

Clients appreciate her ability to help them make progress quickly. After the first session, one emailed to say, “Thank you! Your virtual WD-40™ is already breaking through the rust.” Sherry’s unique mix of insight, analytical thinking, business expertise, and sense of humor **helps her clients discover new approaches and solutions to their situations.**



With over twenty-five years of business experience, both in the corporate world and as a business owner for fifteen years, she knows what it takes to thrive in the face of challenges. Sherry’s philosophy, *The Way You Live Your Day is the Way You Live Your Life™*, summarizes how she helps people focus on managing their choices in order to move from frustration to feeling great.

She began her career as a CPA, followed by ten years in corporate management, finance, and marketing. Eight months before co-founding Priority Ventures Group in 1994, Sherry had her own “it’s time to get unstuck” moment while spending time with her best friend at the end of his life.

Realizing that change begins with an awareness of day-to-day choices — and then seeing the profound changes that occurred in her life as a result — Sherry has made it her life’s work to help people get unstuck so they can create lives that are fulfilling, centered, and balanced.

She holds a PCC (Professional Certified Coach) credential and is a graduate of *The Coaches Training Institute (CTI)*. Additionally, after many years of practicing yoga and discovering how many of the underlying principles are applicable to getting unstuck, she recently completed a yoga teacher training program.

A transplanted Southern Californian, she now lives in Raleigh, NC with her husband Warren, two dogs, and a cat who’s quite certain she’s a dog. She keeps her days flowing with canine-accompanied jogs, good books, stimulating conversation with interesting people, and yoga although not all at the same time. Sherry can be reached by email at sessig@priorityventures.com or by phone at 919-834-6960.