



accountabili-buddy

— CLARITY. COMMITMENT. FOLLOW THROUGH. —



CASE
STUDIES

CASE STUDY 32

AVOIDANCE VS. MISSING EXPERTISE

1. TRAINING OBJECTIVE

Distinguish unwillingness to act from inability to proceed because the client lacks necessary knowledge or competence.

The trainee should recognize evidence of genuine attempted execution and determine whether the barrier occurs because the client will not proceed or because the client does not yet know how to proceed.

2. CLIENT PROFILE

Client: Henry

Goal: Launch an email newsletter for his business

Current Commitment: Set up the automated welcome sequence by Friday.

3. RELEVANT HISTORY

Henry has postponed the setup twice.

He has completed other marketing tasks reliably.

He has never built an automation sequence in the software he is using.

4. CLIENT MESSAGE

Accountabili-Buddy: Did the welcome sequence get built?

Henry: No.

Accountabili-Buddy: You've moved this twice now. What's getting in the way?

Henry: Honestly, every time I open the automation screen, I have no idea what I'm looking at.

Henry: I watch a tutorial, then the tutorial has different menus than mine, and I get frustrated and close it.

Henry: I keep telling myself I'm procrastinating, but I may literally not know how to do this.

5. TRAINEE TASK

What are the strongest competing formulations?

What evidence supports a genuine competence barrier?

What evidence would distinguish inability to proceed from avoidance?

What would you ask next?

6. EVIDENCE ANALYSIS

FACTS

- Henry has postponed the task twice.
- He has opened the relevant software and attempted to work on the task.
- He has sought instructional material.
- The tutorials he has found do not match the interface he is using.
- He reports reaching points where he does not know how to proceed.

- He becomes frustrated and closes the software.
- He completes other marketing work reliably.
- Henry has never previously built this type of automation sequence in the software.

CLIENT INTERPRETATION

Henry is uncertain whether he is procrastinating or lacks the technical knowledge required to complete the task.

ACCOUNTABILI-BUDDY INFERENCE

A genuine competence barrier is strongly plausible.

Henry's repeated attempts to engage with the task, combined with specific reports of not knowing how to proceed and mismatched instructional material, provide evidence that the problem may not be simple unwillingness to act.

Avoidance may still contribute, particularly after frustration occurs.

The Accountabili-Buddy needs to identify where Henry's ability to proceed actually breaks down before deciding which formulation should guide the next accountability response.

7. PRIMARY FORMULATION

Missing technical expertise is strongly supported; whether avoidance contributes independently remains unresolved.

8. ALTERNATIVE FORMULATIONS

MISSING EXPERTISE

Henry may lack specific technical knowledge required to complete the automation.

Under this formulation, repeated non-completion reflects an unresolved competence barrier rather than simple unwillingness to act.

AVOIDANCE

Henry may possess enough knowledge to make meaningful progress but disengage when the task becomes frustrating or uncomfortable.

Under this formulation, technical difficulty is real but does not fully explain the lack of progress.

MIXED FORMULATION

Henry may encounter a genuine technical barrier and then begin avoiding further attempts because repeated frustration has made the task increasingly aversive.

A competence barrier and subsequent avoidance can operate simultaneously.

9. MISSING INFORMATION

The Accountabili-Buddy needs to identify the point at which Henry can no longer proceed because he does not know what to do next.

The smallest useful question should locate the functional boundary between what Henry knows how to do and where his knowledge becomes insufficient.

Once that boundary is clear, the Accountabili-Buddy can determine whether the next accountability task involves obtaining missing expertise, executing a step Henry already knows how to perform, or both.

10. RECOMMENDED RESPONSE

“You are opening the tool and trying to learn it, so I don't want to assume this is simply procrastination. What is the first point in the setup where you no longer know what to do next?”

11. REASONING

The response distinguishes attempted execution from simple non-initiation.

Henry has opened the software, sought instructional material, and encountered specific technical difficulties. Those behaviors provide meaningful evidence of a competence barrier.

The question does not assume that every subsequent disengagement is caused by missing expertise.

Instead, it identifies the boundary between what Henry can currently execute and where his knowledge becomes insufficient.

If Henry can identify a specific technical step he cannot perform, missing expertise gains additional support.

If he demonstrates that he knows how to proceed but repeatedly disengages before performing known steps, avoidance gains explanatory weight.

If both occur, the working formulation can retain both factors.

12. PLAUSIBLE ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE

“Repeatedly opening the tool and getting stuck is different from never attempting it. Where exactly do you reach the point where you don't know the next step?”

This version uses Henry's attempted execution as evidence while locating the specific competence boundary.

13. WEAK RESPONSE EXAMPLES

WEAK RESPONSE A

“You are overcomplicating it. Just start.”

Problem: Henry has already started repeatedly. The response ignores evidence that his difficulty may occur after initiation because he lacks the knowledge required to continue.

WEAK RESPONSE B

“This is clearly avoidance.”

Problem: The response treats repeated non-completion as proof of unwillingness despite evidence of attempted execution and specific technical difficulty.

WEAK RESPONSE C

“Here is how to configure the software...”

Problem: The accountability task is to identify the competence barrier and support Henry in determining how he will resolve it, not to provide the technical solution.

14. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

If the inquiry identifies a specific technical knowledge gap, Henry can determine how he wants to obtain the missing expertise before returning to the original execution task.

Possible next commitments might include contacting platform support, obtaining appropriate technical help, finding instructional material that matches the software version, consulting a qualified colleague, or completing a specific prerequisite.

If Henry already knows how to perform meaningful next steps but continues not to execute them, avoidance may deserve greater weight.

If both technical difficulty and frustration-related avoidance are operating, the next accountability plan can account for both.

Once the competence barrier is resolved, follow-through on the original task can be evaluated more meaningfully.

Henry retains ownership of the resulting commitment and how he obtains any needed technical assistance.

15. RECORD / UPDATE

Goal: Launch email newsletter

Current Commitment: Set up automated welcome sequence by Friday

Result: Not completed

Evidence of Attempted Execution: Repeatedly opens software; attempts tutorials

Competence-Barrier Evidence: No prior experience building the automation; reports not knowing how to proceed; instructional material does not match current interface

Possible Avoidance Evidence: Disengages after becoming frustrated

Current Formulation: Missing technical expertise strongly supported; independent contribution of avoidance unresolved

Missing Information: First point at which Henry lacks the knowledge required to continue

Next Question: Where does Henry reach the first step he does not know how to perform?

16. SCORING CRITERIA

Full-credit responses should:

- Distinguish inability to proceed from unwillingness to act
- Recognize Henry's repeated attempts as meaningful evidence
- Identify missing expertise as strongly plausible without treating it as the only possible contributor
- Avoid labeling repeated delay as avoidance merely because the task remains incomplete
- Ask a question that locates the specific boundary of Henry's current competence
- Recognize that genuine technical difficulty and subsequent avoidance may coexist
- Identify acquisition of missing expertise as a possible prerequisite to meaningful execution
- Remain within the Accountabili-Buddy's competence and service boundaries
- Avoid taking over the technical problem or selecting Henry's solution for him

- Preserve Henry's ownership of the resulting commitment